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Vol. XXXI.



"PRIVATE DUNCAN IS DEAD! HE, TOO, HAS BEEN ASSASSINATED BY THIS MYSTERIOUS AVENGER!"

OR,

THE ARMY CAPTAIN'S CRIME.

The Romance of the Woman Shadower
of the Fort.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE BUCCANEER MIDSHIPMAN,"
"DASHING CHARLIE" NOVELS. "DICK
DOOM" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

PROLOGUE.

THE chief of the United States Secret Service Bureau, sat in his pleasant quarters in Washington reading a letter which had just come to him from the far frontier and bore the stamp of an army post.

The letter was as follows:

"I am instructed by the general commanding this military district to appeal to you for your most capable Secret Service man to be at once sent to this post to unravel a mystery which has thwarted every effort to solve it.

"To those of us who have investigated, as far as possible, the mysterious workings of all that has occurred, it appears to be the work of an avenger, an army Nemesis, as soldier after soldier has fallen and not the slightest clue can be obtained of the reason of these midnight murders, or of the one who commits them.

"Failing, with all my efforts to clear up the mystery, I appealed to the general and he requested that I write you, asking for your aid.

"I would suggest that you send a man, or men, who understands life on the border, and will come unknown to all save myself, for therein will be the advantage he will hold over all here at the fort, who must be watched by this Nemesis and thus thwarted.

"An early response will oblige,

"Yours, etc.,

"CHAS. EMMETT,

"Colonel Com'd'g
"Fort Faraway."

The Secret Service chief read this communication twice over and then muttered:

"I know just the man if I can reach him in time.

"He has been the most successful ferret I ever knew of, and has unraveled mystery after mystery, in New Orleans, Memphis, New York and elsewhere, and follows a track as untiringly and mercilessly as a bloodhound.

"I have heard that he has the fancy to carry with him a pair of solid gold manacles, and that he is known among detectives as Dick Doom, the Ferret of the Golden Fetters.

"I will see if I can find him by wire."

As the chief spoke a man entered with a card.

One glance at it and the chief cried:

"Glorious! the very man I was thinking of.

"Show him in, Gordon."

A moment after the visitor entered.

He was a mere youth, with a darkly bronzed, beardless face which was womanly in its beauty, and full of expression.

He was neatly dressed and his manners were dignified and courtly.

"I have not had the pleasure of meeting you before, chief, but have letters to you from the Chief of Police of New Orleans, Boston New York and Chicago, and I am anxious to get certain authority for working different States which you alone can give me, sir."

"Mr. Doom, I am glad to meet you, for I have heard much of your wonderfully clever work, and shall be glad to help you all in my power.

"I was just going to wire to find you for a special work on hand.

"Read this letter, please, and say if you will undertake the work," and the chief placed in the hands of the young ferret the letter from Colonel Emmett.

"I should like to undertake the solution of this mystery, sir, and will, especially as I am on a duty that calls me West.

"The truth is, sir, that the most noted criminal of modern days, who was run down by me and confined in a mad-house, he having been pronounced a madman, is reported as having taken his own life by getting the iron chains loose from the floor, wrenching a bar from his window and throwing himself into the river.

"Of course, ironed heavily as he was he would at once sink; but I am determined to know whether he did die in the river that night, or feigning madness made his escape."

"You refer to Valentine Gibson, Mr. Doom?"

"I do, sir."

"I have reports of the affair, but incline to believe that he is dead."

"I have known him so long and well, have seen him escape from all bars and chains, that I believe he is alive, sir, and if so, he will seek the Western country, I feel sure."

"But it was a year or more ago that he disappeared from the asylum where he was confined."

"Yes, sir, just twenty-two months ago, and I have been trying to find some clue ever since."

"I fear you are doomed to disappointment, sir."

"It may be, chief, but I never desert a trail until I come to the end of it."

"I have heard that of you, Mr. Doom."

"But now as to my case with you?"

"I am ready to start at once, sir."

"Good! I will wire the colonel to the nearest point where a courier can be found to go to the fort, that a man starts at once on the work."

"Do you need help?"

"No, sir, I work alone."

"And can I be of any assistance to you in getting you away, money and in anything else?"

"Thank you, sir, no, for I am well supplied with funds of my own, as I am not a poor man, and that fact helps me much, I find, in my work."

"I will ask you for certain papers of authority, which I may find myself in need of, and you see my badges give me power," and opening his coat Dick Doom revealed his breast covered with badges of gold, some of them set in precious stones.

"You certainly possess ample authority, Mr. Doom, and yet I will give you papers that may aid you and backup your badges, if need be."

"Now, sir, we will talk over this strange mystery at Fort Faraway, and see what conclusions we can reach."

For over an hour the chief and Dick Doom talked together, and that night the Ferret of the Golden Fetters left Washington City for the far West to unravel the mystery of the avenging Nemesis against the army.

CHAPTER I.

THE SILENT SLAYER.

A SENTINEL was pacing to and fro on his post at a frontier fort, and counting the minutes before the relief came on his rounds to place another soldier in his place and give him his liberty from duty for awhile.

The moonlight shone full upon his face, revealing the stern expression of the soldier softened by thoughts of home, as he gazed upon the scene before him in all its beauty.

His position was at the point of a ridge, overlooking the prairie for miles, and behind him was woodland, with the fort, surrounded by a stockade wall, a short distance in the rear.

It was nearly time for the relief guard to come upon its rounds, when the eye of the sentinel fell upon a horseman coming slowly across the prairie.

He was yet some distance away, but form of horse and rider were plainly visible in the moonlight.

"One of the scouts coming in," muttered the soldier as he saw that the horseman appeared like one of the Buckskin Rangers of the fort.

Nearer drew the horseman until, when within a few rods of the sentinel the latter challenged sharply:

"Halt! who comes there?"

"Friend with the countersign," came the response in a low tone.

"Dismount, friend!"

"Advance and give the countersign," commanded the sentinel.

As he gave the order he brought his musket to a "ready."

The horseman dismounted in silence, left his horse standing and advanced slowly up the path toward the sentinel.

He halted a few paces away and suddenly his right arm was raised, there was a quick jerk of the wrist, a whizzing sound and a death-cry from the soldier as a long-bladed bowie-knife buried itself almost to the hilt in his heart.

The musket dropped from the hand of the sentinel, falling upon the hard earth with a ringing sound, and the man fell heavily and at full length.

Then the Silent Slayer stepped quickly forward, gazed an instant upon the upturned face of the man he had slain and stooping over placed his fingers upon the pulse.

He made no remark, but turning strode back to his horse and rode away in silence.

"He had not gotten far before the heavy tread of the "relief guard" was heard approaching.

It came along the ridge, a corporal and eight men, and yet there came no challenge from the sentinel.

His tall form was not visible, and halting his squad the corporal advanced alone.

Had the sentinel deserted his post of duty, he wondered?

But he had reached the spot where he could see beyond a low clump of bushes.

There, lying upon his back, his open eyes gazing straight at the moon, was the soldier.

The corporal sprang quickly to his side, bent over and beheld the knife left sticking in the heart of the soldier by the Silent Slayer.

"My God!"

"He is dead!" cried the corporal greatly shocked.

"Yes."

"The sentinel was off duty forever," and off on the prairie, still visible in the moonlight was seen the horseman riding away after his red work.

The cry of the corporal brought his men quickly to his side, and then all beheld the dead form of their comrade.

"He has been murdered on his post, men," said the corporal.

"Yes, corporal, and yonder goes a man who perhaps did the deed," said a soldier.

"I will give the alarm at once," responded the corporal, and a volley of musketry was fired, while loud rung the cry:

"Turn out the guard for Post Number One!"

It was but a short while before the captain, who was officer of the day, and a number of soldiers came at a double-quick toward Post Number One.

The corporal explained the situation and pointed toward the dead body.

The captain made a search of the body, and upon him was found a roll of money, his watch and chain and a ring.

"This shows that robbery was not the cause of the murder."

"No, this is the work of an avenger," the captain said.

Then he asked:

"You saw a horseman riding away, corporal?"

"Yes, sir, and he is still visible, for he has not quickened his pace, as though defying pursuit."

"He shall be at once pursued," was the stern rejoinder, and ten minutes after several scouts and a dozen soldiers were upon the trail of the Silent Slayer.

CHAPTER II.

THE DOOMED SPY.

A YEAR before the death of the sentinel upon his post, there was trouble along the Overland Trails, for the stage-coaches were held up with a regularity when carrying treasure, or passengers who had money and valuables, that showed there was a spy close at headquarters, who was reporting to the band of outlaws just when to halt a coach, and when not to do so.

Every effort was made to discover who this spy was, yet no clue could be obtained, and notwithstanding rewards were offered for the discovery no one could be accused of the crime with any chance of proof of guilt.

But at last a letter was received by a captain at the fort, Abner Ainsley, which read as follows:

"The spy who is in the pay of the outlaws is the young man who is known at the fort as the Boy Scout."

"Watch him closely and see if he does not carry news at certain times to the road-agents."

There was no signature to this communication, and it was tacked, so Captain Ainsley said, to the door of his quarters.

He took it, however, to the commandant of the fort and submitted it.

"I have little faith in any charge made by one who hides his name, Captain Ainsley, yet still it can do no harm to watch the youth and see if you can find out any clue that is suspicious," said Colonel Emmett.

"I will, sir."

"At the same time say nothing to any one about your having received this note."

"I will keep it secret, sir," was the answer, and Captain Ainsley at once put one of the best scouts in the fort upon the watch to see what discovery could be made of the truth of the charge against the accused.

The Boy Scout was a young man of seventeen, perhaps, with a slender form, long red-gold hair, black eyes and a face as handsome as one would care to see.

He had come to the fort one day with a letter to Colonel Emmett, and asked to be appointed a scout, claiming to have had experience as such in New Mexico and Texas.

The colonel had spoken to the chief of scouts about him, but that officer did not seem inclined to accept him as a member of the company of Buckskin Rangers, on account of his youth and inexperience, and so he became a courier, carrying the mail between the fort and a station some seventy miles away.

Twice he had brought in valuable information of the movements of the Indians, and as his duties as mail courier took but two days of the week, the balance of his time he was wont to spend in scouting, and thus became known as the Boy Scout.

Once he had been known to rescue the coach from robbery by road-agents, boldly dashing in upon them, and again he had given a warning that saved some Government treasure from being taken by the outlaws.

As he was fearless, a rapid rider and ever ready to do his duty, while he had rendered valuable services, Colonel Emmett was slow in

believing the charge against him in the unsigned letter.

The Boy Scout was known only as Kit Kent, for so he called himself, though the soldiers had nicknamed him "the Rattler," on account of his rapid riding, and he had become most popular with all at the fort.

He had his little cabin aloof from all others, was never known to gamble or drink, and held aloof as much as possible, seeming most fond of books, of which he had bought up quite a number from the soldiers.

When Captain Ainsley left the colonel's quarters, with orders to put a scout upon the young courier, he sent for chief of scouts Buck Taylor, and ordered him to put two of his best men to shadow Kit Kent.

"I can only say, Taylor, that he is suspected of being a spy, so I wish to know all that he does, so that the charge against him may be proven if he is guilty, or shown to have been a false accusation.

"Now, what men will you put to watch him?"

"Spanish Joe and Pony Pete, sir."

"They are both good men for the work, Taylor, so set them at it at once."

"I will, sir."

Ten days passed away and there had been another robbery of the stage-coach, and a large sum had been taken, On Time Charlie, the driver, being powerless to prevent.

The day following the holding up of the coach, Buck Taylor went to Captain Ainsley with a report.

Both Spanish Joe and Pony Pete had shadowed the Boy Scout, and each had made a discovery.

Spanish Joe reported that the Boy Scout, when on his last ride, had stopped at a certain rock and hidden away a note, and that soon after a masked man had visited the spot and had taken it away, very cleverly eluding the watching scout, as though he suspected that he might be observed.

Pony Pete had reported that a masked man, answering the description of the one who got the Boy Scout's note, had held up On Time Charlie's coach, shot the guard dead, and robbed it of the treasure-box.

This "proof" of the Boy Scout's guilt of being the spy was taken to the colonel, and the young courier was at once arrested, and that his doom was sealed all felt certain, for orders had come to hang the guilty party or parties, the moment their identity was known, and without trial.

CHAPTER III.

THE SENTENCE.

CAPTAIN AINSLEY was the one who arrested the Boy Scout as a spy.

He went to the cabin of the youth, and found Kit Kent there swinging in his hammock, which he used in place of a cot.

He was reading and sprang to his feet at the sight of the officer, saluting politely.

"Kent, I am here to perform what to me is a most unpleasant duty indeed," said the captain.

"Yes, sir," was the calm reply.

"I am here to arrest you, and my men are without to take you to the guard-house as a prisoner."

"Arrest me, Captain Ainsley?" and the face of the youth flushed and then became very pale.

"So I said, Kent."

"What is the charge against me, sir?"

"That you are a spy."

"A spy."

"Yes."

"My God!"

"How can I be a spy, for I am no renegade to my race?"

"You are not accused of being a renegade, but a spy, informing the outlaw band of road-agents of the movements of treasure that are made to and from this fort."

"Captain Ainsley, this is false, a shameful plot against me, for I am as innocent as you are of this charge," was the indignant reply.

"In my own mind, Kent, I believe you to be innocent."

"But there were accusations made against you, and being shadowed, proof was given that you were a spy, or at least sufficient proof to cause the colonel to order your arrest, and hence I am but doing my duty in obeying orders."

The youth bowed his head and said:

"I am your prisoner, sir, and though innocent I fear I can give no proof of being so."

"Well, you must try and do so."

"Are you ready?"

"I am, sir."

And so Kit Kent was led away to the guard-

house and two hours later was taken before Colonel Emmett.

He was accused of being the spy of the road-agents and denied the accusation, but was asked why he had left a letter at a certain point on his trail, and which letter was taken away by a masked horseman, who afterward had been the one to attack the coach, kill the general and take the treasure?

He started at the question, yet could offer no excuse, only saying that he had done no wrong, whatever he might appear to be guilty of.

Obeying orders from his superior, and which admitted of no discretion, Colonel Emmett said:

"Kit Kent, I have only to say that you offer no excuse for your act, of which you are proven guilty and I am commanded, so constant and successful have been the crimes committed by the outlaws against the Government and the public on this frontier, to carry out at once my orders, which are to hang, without delay of trial, all persons who are known to be guilty of outlawry."

"In your case your own words condemn you, for you admit placing the note there which the masked outlaw took, and used against the Government, for the guard was killed and the coach robbed of the treasure."

"You refuse to give any explanation of the affair, and hence it is my painful duty to carry out my orders and sentence you to death."

"What have you now to say against your execution as a spy?"

"I only ask, sir, a respite of one week, and that it may be made known along the frontier that I am sentenced to death, as an outlaw spy, upon a certain day."

"If, by that time, my innocence is not proven, I ask no more," and the youth was calm and unmoved by the sentence.

"I will grant you the respite, yes, I will give you two weeks, for Heaven knows how glad I will be to have you prove your innocence, Kit Kent."

"Two weeks from to-day, if no proof is brought to me, that you are not guilty, then you must die, for my orders are to have executed immediately, all who are guilty."

"I thank you, sir, and if I give no proof of my innocence, I accept the sentence without a murmur; but I ask that my sentence as an outlaw spy be made known along the border."

"It shall be done, for I shall have it read at parade to-day, and posted in the camps and at the stage stations."

"Again I thank you, Colonel Emmett," and the youth, still presenting the calm face and nerve he had shown throughout, turned to the guard and was led away.

"What do you think of him, Ainsley?" asked the colonel, when he was gone.

"I am sorry to say, sir, that I believe him guilty."

"I do not."

"May I ask why, sir?"

"He has some motive for this delay."

"Perhaps a belief that he can escape."

"No, a belief that he can prove his innocence of the charge, for it is hard for me to feel that the boy is guilty."

"He is no boy, colonel, young as he looks, for he confessed to being twenty-one years of age."

"True, and looks seventeen."

"Well, I only hope I will not have to hang him," and the face of the colonel wore a troubled look.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAPTAIN AND THE SPY.

"GUARD, you can walk aside, for I will be responsible for the prisoner's safety, and I have business with him."

So said Captain Ainsley several days after the sentence of the spy, as he walked to the guard-house where the youth was a prisoner.

He entered the cabin, to find the prisoner swinging in his hammock, for he had asked to have this luxury allowed him.

The youth arose as the captain entered, and it was seen that one foot had a manacle upon it, and he was chained to the floor of the cabin.

"Kent, I have come to have a talk with you."

"Yes, sir, sit down, please."

The captain sat down upon the bench, while the youth made a swing of the hammock, and awaited the pleasure of his visitor.

"Kent, do you know me?"

"I do, sir."

"You then must know that I have recognized you?"

The youth started, and paled, but asked quietly:

"Who am I, sir?"

"You are Kit Kenton, not Kent, the twin brother of Miss Catherine Kenton."

"Then you never met me, sir?"

"No, but I have met your sister."

"And how did you know me, sir?"

"I was puzzled by your resemblance to some one I had once known well, from the moment I saw you here."

"I could not place you."

"But I was the one to look over your effects in your cabin, and I came across some clever pencil sketches there."

"One was of your home, which I at once knew, and another of your sister, which I also recognized."

"This brought to my mind the fact that your sister had a twin brother who had run away from home some years ago, and it was said had gone to the frontier."

"Thus I placed you."

"I see, sir, and, if I am not mistaken, my parents wished my sister Kate to become your wife?"

"They did."

"But she refused?"

"There was a rival in the way, but he is now removed from my path."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, for he was an adventurer, I believe, and unworthy of her."

"He met her under romantic circumstances, and so gained her regard, and it was said that he was recognized by a detective as a former convict, so had to fly for his life."

"Well, Captain Ainsley?"

"With the man who was my rival out of my way, and a claim upon your sister, I feel sure that I could win her?"

"She would be well worth winning, sir, for she is the heiress to a million, and more, with me out of the way."

"Not to speak of her sweet self."

"True, sir; but what was the claim which you said you would have upon her, may I ask?"

"You are under sentence of death?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have so far given no proof that you are innocent."

"No, sir."

"Do you expect to?"

"I hope to, sir."

"Upon what grounds?"

"I had hoped ere this, sir, to have given my proof of innocence."

"But have not?"

"No, sir."

"But may I ask if the fact that I am sentenced to death is known?"

"It has been read at parade, and posted at the camps and stations."

"But what good will this do you?"

"That I cannot tell to you, sir."

"See here, Kent, I feel the deepest interest in you, for, as I believe you are aware, I loved your sister, still love her most devotedly."

"Her romantic attachment for the man who proved unworthy of her, I will gladly overlook and seek to win her love for my own."

"Yes, sir."

"Now I do not believe there is any power that can save you from death, and only in one way can you be saved."

"Yes, sir."

"I will tell you that you can only save your life by making your escape from here."

"I will find that hard to do, sir, and to do so would be proof of my guilt."

"It would look so, but, free, you can perhaps prove your innocence."

"It is not for me to prove it, sir, but another upon whom I depend."

"Do not place your dependence upon any one, Kent, for you will fail."

"I wish to save you, and will, but I can only do so by aiding you to escape."

"From your love of my sister, sir?"

"Yes, we will call it so."

"With no terms?"

"Well, yes, there are certain conditions, Kent."

"Will you name them, sir?"

"I know your sister is devoted to you, her twin brother, that she idolizes you in fact."

"As I do her, sir."

"Then my terms are that, in consideration for my aiding you to escape you go to where your sister is, tell her that I saved your life, at the risk of losing my rank, and being disgraced, and urge her to become my wife."

"I cannot do this, Captain Ainsley."

"Cannot?" sternly asked the captain.

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"In the first place, sir, I know that she does not love you."

"You know this?"

"I do, sir."

"How?"

"From her own lips, for I have seen her since she refused your love, and I know that she loves another."

"Remember, you will have to die then!" said the officer almost savagely.

"I accept the alternative, sir, if I must."

"Then die you will," and with this the officer arose quickly and left the prisoner to his own bitter thoughts.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST REQUEST.

THE two weeks rolled by and yet no proof had come that Kit Kent the Boy Scout was guiltless of the charge against him.

So the orders were given by the colonel to prepare for his execution.

Upon the evening before the day of execution a note was handed to the colonel from the doomed youth.

Opening it he read, in a hand that showed that he had been educated, as follows:

"COL. CHARLES EMMETT:—

"MY DEAR SIR:—If, by noon to-morrow, I have given no proof of my innocence, I shall ask no further respite at your hands, and will be ready to face my fate.

"But yet I have a last request to make of you.

"Perhaps I should say requests, and something tells me that you will grant them.

"First, I must beg of you that you will allow me to be shot and not hanged.

"I will face death bravely when confronting the soldier executioners, but to go to the gallows would break me down.

"I beg of you then to detail an execution squad, of sixteen men, all with loaded guns, and not every other man as is the custom.

"I would also request that Captain Abner Ainsley be the officer who commands the execution platoon.

"And still more, sir, that there may be no mistake, I would beg to stand upright in my coffin, stood upon end, facing my executioners, and not to be touched after death, the lid to be placed at once upon the coffin and my burial immediately follow.

"Have I asked too much, sir, of you?"

"I trust not, and that an early response will be given me of what I am to expect in answer to my note to you.

"With my pardon to you, for the part which your duty compels you to take, against me, and only kind wishes for your future, believe me,

"With respect,

"KIT KENT,

"The Boy Scout."

Colonel Emmett twice read this note over and there were tears in the eyes of the brave man as he did so.

"Poor boy, I would give much to save him, but alas! I fear that he is guilty.

"I was in hopes that this was a confession, an answer to my note to him offering him his life if he would give evidence against the outlaw band.

"But, other than that he sent me word that he had no evidence to give, he has made no reply.

"Now comes this letter, and I hardly know what to do.

"But yet I cannot refuse his last request, I can but grant it.

"He wishes to be shot instead of hanged.

"It shall be so.

"He asks for an execution platoon of sixteen men.

"It shall be as he requests.

"Then he desires to have Ainsley command the execution and give the order to fire.

"I will so order it.

"This ghastly idea of standing upright in his coffin I do not admire.

"But then the whole affair is a ghastly one and can be no worse, and as the request of a dying boy, why I should not grant it I cannot see.

"Yes, it shall be as he desires.

"He does not wish any one to touch him after death.

"Well, I shall see that this wish is carried out too.

"Now to send him word that his last requests shall be granted."

With this the colonel folded up the letter of the doomed boy, and placed it carefully away.

Then he called his orderly and said:

"Go to the prison of the youth, Kit Kent, and state that I have received his letter, and that his each request shall be granted."

"Yes, sir; but, oh, colonel, your pardon, sir; but cannot that poor boy be saved, for he does seem so innocent, and he is but a child in looks."

The old orderly looked appealingly at his colonel, and there were tears in his eyes.

He had presumed to speak as he did, from his feeling for the condemned youth.

But the colonel did not reply in anger, but said:

"No, Tracey, I fear that there is no hope for him; but he shall be shot, not hanged."

"Bless God for that, sir, or rather your own kind heart, for you do it, sir."

"Now go, Tracey, and tell the youth what I have said, and return by Captain Ainsley's quarters, telling him that I desire to see him at once."

The old orderly saluted and disappeared, and when, half an hour after, he returned, his eyes were red and his lips quivering as he said:

"I told him, sir."

"What did he say?"

"He said, sir:

"God bless that good man."

"How did he receive the news?"

"Without a flinch of fear, sir; but, here comes Captain Ainsley, sir," and Orderly Tracey departed, after announcing the captain, who was startled by the colonel's words:

"Captain Ainsley, I have commuted the death sentence of the boy Kent from hanging to shooting, and you are to command the execution, and here are my written instructions, to see that they are carried out fully."

CHAPTER VI.

THE EXECUTION.

COLONEL EMMETT was most anxious to find some excuse for saving the youth he had been compelled to sentence to death.

It was true that he had been led to feel that he was guilty, in the face of seeming positive proof; but he was such a bright, handsome fellow, young and brave, and he wished he could save him, as he believed his sins to be those of the head, not the heart.

But the time had come to act, and the hour of execution was at hand.

Captain Ainsley had received his orders, and it looked as though that officer did not wish to carry them out, would, in fact, much rather not have been the one selected for the work.

The order had been given for the troops to assemble to witness the execution, and at the appointed hour they were in line.

Then came the execution platoon, of sixteen men, with Captain Ainsley at their head.

They marched away to the guard-room, and the youth was ready to receive them.

He was very pale, but full of nerve, and said simply:

"I am ready, Captain Ainsley, and you see, rather than make a pledge my sister would not keep, I am content to go to my death, which, thanks to the noble nature of Colonel Emmett, is not to die upon the gallows.

"I am ready, sir, and I suppose you know the terms allowed me by the colonel?"

"Yes, I have his written instructions, Kent, and they shall be carried out.

"I need not say to you how painful this duty is to me, and when I see your sister, which I will do, I shall tell her that you died bravely."

"You would tell her that I was shot as the spy of outlaws, their ally in robbing the Government?"

"Is this generous, Captain Ainsley?"

"She must know of it in time," and the captain looked confused.

"How so, when I die as Kit Kent, the Boy Scout, and you alone know my real name?" and there was a sneer in the boy's words.

"I had not thought of that.

"I will keep your secret, Kent."

"Then let us go at once, for this suspense is most trying," and the lips of the boy quivered.

The officer now led him from his prison pen, and when he would have put irons upon him the youth said:

"No, no, not those.

"I will appeal to Colonel Emmett before I die in irons."

"My duty is plain and you must put on these manacles.

"No, send an orderly to Colonel Emmett and ask him if I must."

The lad was determined and the captain sent a sergeant to the colonel.

"What answer?" eagerly asked the boy as the sergeant returned.

"The colonel's compliments, sir, and says the prisoner is not to be bound or ironed."

A smile of triumph covered the face of the youthful prisoner, and then the march was taken up for the parade ground.

Down the line went the boy, the eyes of all falling upon him, mostly in pity; then the

drums rolled, the pipes piped forth their sad half-sbriek, half-wail, and the march was begun to the scene of execution, half a mile away from the fort.

The youth refused to ride upon his coffin in the wagon, and walked with a firm step amid his guards.

The spot was reached; three sides of a hollow square were formed, one end being open, and the doomed boy walked up to his grave and coolly looked down in it.

Every eye was upon him in admiration of his courage.

Captain Ainsley was as white as the young prisoner, and moved about in the execution of his duties like one who had a sorrow in his heart and felt the keenest mental anguish.

The platoon of sixteen men was drawn up just thirty paces from the foot of the grave.

At the grave's head the coffin was to be placed, and the fire was to be across the pit.

Then the coffin was stood on end at the head of the grave: the condemned boy took his stand in it, and boldly faced the execution platoon of sixteen soldiers, who were ordered at the "Ready!"

"Good-by, Kent, and Heaven have mercy upon you," and Captain Ainsley stepped up to the upright coffin and extended his hand.

But all saw that the youth did not take it, and yet did not hear the words:

"I will not take your hand, Captain Ainsley; and, mark my words, some day you will rue the part you play now as the executioner of one who is innocent of the crime of which I am accused.

"Yes, as also will those who I learn were volunteers to be in the platoon of execution, when those detailed begged off from the work.

"But, I am ready; so go and do your duty."

"But, Kent, I—"

"Do not keep me waiting, for all hope is gone now."

"Do your duty, sir!"

The words rung out like a command from an officer; the captain turned away, stepped to his position, and a moment after the fatal order was given which sent nearly a score of bullets into the breast of the brave Boy Scout, Kit Kent.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DRIVER OF THE OVERLAND.

THE last requests of the Boy Scout were faithfully carried out, for Colonel Emmett himself saw that they were attended to.

The force of the rain of bullets had upset the coffin, and as it fell its length the boy lay in it, his spirit having taken flight at once.

The colonel came forward with the surgeon and the latter laid his fingers upon the pulse and pronounced him dead.

Then the colonel gently folded the hands upon the blood-stained breast, the lid of the coffin was screwed down close and the box was lowered into the open grave.

The dirt was thrown in, and at its head was placed a board on which a soldier, who was a skillful wood-carver, had cut:

"KIT KENT,

THE BOY SCOUT.

EXECUTED APRIL 1ST, 18—.

He pleaded 'Not Guilty.'

Military Law said that he was 'Guilty.'

Who shall know?"

The colonel read the carved lines over slowly, with every eye upon him, and many supposed that he would refuse to let the board be placed in position.

But he said nothing, and when the grave was made turned away with a sigh.

Captain Ainsley was as white-faced as a corpse and went at once to his quarters.

It was evident that he was deeply moved.

The volunteer execution platoon dispersed, and it seemed as though they regretted their red work, or most of them at least, and an old sergeant said aloud:

"They'll remember that handsome, brave, boyish face for many a long day, and at night will see it in their dreams."

"I would not be one of them for a life's pay."

The band struck up a lively air as the troops marched back to quarters, and yet the shadows in the hearts of the men deepened as the night came on, and a gloom settled upon the fort and all in it.

It was strange how many, in spite of the seeming proofs of his guilt, began to feel that the youth was innocent.

He had died with no confession, had refused to see the chaplain of the fort, who sought to

have him confess all, for he said that he had nothing to confess.

The day after the last robbery of his coach and killing of the guard accompanying him, On Time Charlie, the driver, had laid off at the station end of the line.

He gave no other excuse than that he wished rest, and was going on a hunt in the mountains, having hired another driver to take his place.

He returned to his post of duty on time, and bringing with him his horse laden with game.

Then, for the first time, he learned of the suspicion falling upon the Boy Scout of being the ally of the road-agents, his arrest and execution.

On Time Charlie heard the news from the station-master at the end of his run, and he uttered a cry which fairly startled the one who told him of the boy's death.

"Good God!

"Do you mean it, Hank Leathers?

"Have they murdered that boy?" cried the drivers savagely.

"Yes, Charlie, but don't take it so to heart, though I know you liked him much."

"Liked him?

"By heaven, but I loved that boy, and now they have murdered him."

"I tell you, Hank, it was a crime!" and in his excitement the driver forgot his usual way of speaking in the dialect of the border.

"You see they had all proof of his guilt, Charlie."

"What proof had they?"

"Well, he was seen to leave a letter at a certain place, where there were traces of a rendezvous, and a masked horseman got it from there."

"The next day that same masked horseman who got the letter, was the one who held up your coach, killed the guard and got the Government money."

"As you laid off, on the run out again you did not hear of this."

"No, and I only wish I had."

"But there are many masked horsemen on the trails, and that one who got the letter might not have been the man who held up my coach."

"I tell you, Hank Leathers, a great crime has been committed, and some day it will all come out."

"Why, I would not have had that boy put to death for a fortune."

"He was a chipper young fellow, Charlie, and there was the making of a fine man in him."

"They do say that the colonel was greatly cut up about it and did all he could to save him, while the soldiers would not go on the detail of execution, and they had to call for volunteers."

"And they got them?"

"Oh, yes, sixteen of them, who, I guess, are now ashamed of their work."

"Who commanded the execution, Hank?"

"Captain Ainsley."

The driver was still deeply moved by what he had heard.

He passed to and fro, his face dark with anger, his broad bosom heaving and his eyes flashing fire.

He was a man of fine physique, six feet in height, with great broad shoulders and a face that was tanned to the hue of leather.

His hair was gray, as was his long beard, yet it seemed prematurely so, for his movements were quick and he did not appear to be much over thirty-five years of age.

He was dressed in a blue velvet coat, white corduroy pants, a silk shirt and black scarf, wore a black sombrero with broad brim, and top-boots.

He carried a revolver upon each hip and wore a blue sash over his belt, giving him altogether a most striking appearance and distinguished air.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FAIR PASSENGER.

ON TIME CHARLIE had a long drive of it, for his run was seventy-five miles, with but four relays of horses.

He was wont to leave the fort at sunrise, going east, and reach his station after nightfall.

On the return, going west, he would leave at night, upon the arrival of the incoming coaches from the east, north and south, for it was a junction, and he was due at the fort at noon the following day.

The night-ride was a dangerous one, from the nature of the country, and by daylight there was the danger of being held up by road-agents, who had every chance to rob a coach and escape, from the nature of the country being in their favor.

After having heard of the execution of the

youth Kit Kent, On Time Charlie seemed deeply moved.

He did not go in to supper at Hank Leathers's hotel, and seemed to brood greatly over what had been told him.

He was a man who was generally popular, for he was genial to all, and one known to be devoid of all fear, an important thing in the make-up of a borderman.

He had come to the Overland Trail some time before, sent there as a man who would take all risks in going through with his coach, and would fight when there was a shadow of a chance to win victory, and surrender with grace when the odds were too great against him.

Several times he had brought in on the top of his coach the outlaw who had held him up, to discover too late that he had gotten hold of the wrong driver.

Once he had come in with two outlaws, as a specimen of his skill, and again, when ambushed by Indians, had beaten them off, gotten a couple of scalps, and after losing four of his six horses, had run the gantlet of the red-skins' fire, and brought the coach in safely with but two horses, and a couple of passengers, the wife and daughter of an army officer at the fort.

With such a record, earned in so short a time, On Time Charlie had become very popular and everyone admired him for his pluck and skill as a driver.

It was known that On Time Charlie was a gambler, and that he risked his month's wages always in a desire to win more, or lose what he had.

He was wont to spend his nights at the fort end of his run, in "The Lottery," a gambling den not far from the post, and where all the wild spirits of the border were wont to congregate.

In this place he had twice taken life, but with the fact to his credit that he had not sought the quarrel in either case, and each time had freed the frontier of a desperado whom the soldiers were glad to get rid of.

When the eastern coach came in that night, it was over two hours late, and to the amazement of all was driven by a woman.

By her side upon the box lay the dead body of the driver, Dick Spaulding, a man who made it his boast to run the gantlet of the road-agents who attempted to hold him up.

As a consequence of this reckless resolve he carried a dozen ugly scars which had very nearly proven to be fatal wounds.

When the coach drew up at the door of the station hotel there was a general exclamation of surprise.

It was two hours late, it was a dark night, but four horses drew it instead of six, and there on the box, with the reins in her hands, sat a woman.

She wore gauntlet gloves, was dressed in a dark blue suit, slouch hat of gray and a sable feather, and her face was concealed by a veil.

"This is Station Q, I presume," she said in an inquiring way as she glanced over the group.

"It is, lady, and I am Hank Leathers, station-master and boss of the hotel."

"Is it true that I see Dick Spaulding a dead man?"

"You do, sir."

"He was killed by road-agents some dozen miles back on the trail."

"You are the only passenger, and you seem to have had a very exciting time of it, miss."

"It has been a tragic one at least, sir."

"Were you robbed of much, may I ask?"

"I was not robbed at all, sir."

"Indeed?"

"Then the road-agents, after killing poor Dick, spared you?"

"Not intentionally," was the quiet reply, and the lady dismounted from her seat and continued:

"I desire to get supper, sir, and to go on by the first stage."

"When does it leave?"

"Supper is ready now, miss, and the coach leaves soon after."

"This is On Time Charlie, miss, who takes the coach on to the fort, for there I suppose you are going?"

"Yes."

And with the reply the lady turned to On Time Charlie, who had dropped his hat and stood regarding her with respectful attention.

"I beg pardon, but what name did you say, sir?" she asked sweetly.

Here was a young lady, presumably, for her veil covered her face, who had brought in the dead body of the driver of her coach, and drove in with the horses running, while she calmly

asked about supper and when introduced to the man who was to carry her on the rest of the way, quietly asked his name.

She was a study to Hank Leathers, a surprise and at once riveted the attention of On Time Charlie.

"His name, miss, is On Time Charlie, for he is one of that kind who gets there every time, no matter what happens, and he's the dandy driver of the Overland."

"On Time Charlie, miss, is his name, only I don't know yours, to introduce you to him."

"My name is Emma Bell."

"Mrs. or miss, for you look like a young girl?"

"I am Miss Emma Bell, and I have come to the fort upon a special mission, sir."

Then she turned to On Time Charlie and extending her hand said in an impressive way:

"I am glad to meet you, sir, and I honor and appreciate you noble men who daily risk your lives for others."

"A short three hours ago that brave man Spaulding was alive, and see, now he is a corpse."

"Well, Mr. On Time Charlie, I am as hungry as a wolf, and so will go and get supper, but afterward we will become better friends," and the fair passenger walked into the tavern while On Time Charlie stood gazing after her with a strange expression upon his face.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FAIR DRIVER'S STORY.

It was the duty of Hank Leathers to escort his passenger in to supper and see that she was well supplied.

There was no doubt but that she fared better by far than the average visitor at Hank's Hotel, as it was familiarly called, for he did all in his power to please her.

Then he went out to see On Time Charlie who had had his supper.

He found the driver standing where they had left him, and wrapped in deep meditation.

"Well, Charlie, what do you think of her?" he asked.

"Dunno."

The reply was short and in the dialect of the border.

"Well, I don't know either, Charlie."

"Who is she?"

"I do not know."

"Didn't discover?"

"No."

"Her name's Bell."

"Yes."

"She's a beauty, for I got a glimpse under her veil, when she went in with you."

"She's a beauty indeed."

"What's she going to ther fort fer?"

"I do not know."

"Hank."

"Yes, Charlie."

"Somewhere I have seen that girl before."

"Think so?"

"I knows it."

"When?"

"Dunno."

"Where?"

"Dunno."

"Who is she?"

"Dunno."

"But you have seen her before?"

"Sure."

"She didn't seem to know you."

"Maybe not."

"Well, she's eating a dandy supper, and all we know about her is that she brought in the coach with poor Dick dead and two horses missing."

"She drove in, too, as though she knew how to handle the ribbons."

"That's a sure thing that she does."

"Didn't explain to you?"

"Not a word."

"Well, I'll chin her on ther trail if she rides up with me."

"She says she wants to ride on the box."

"She shall, and I'll be glad of her comp'ny."

"Then you'll find out something about her."

"I may, and I may not."

"Tell me when you come back."

"I'll do it."

"But here she comes."

And out came the passenger of whom they were speaking.

She joined the two men and said:

"By the way, Mr. Leathers, for such I believe is your name, I have told you nothing of Driver Dick Spaulding's death?"

"No, miss."

"Are you not curious to know?"

"We hain't women, you know, miss."

"Ah, yes, it is my sex who are accused of having all the curiosity."

"So they say, miss; but On Time Charlie and I are curious to know about poor Dick, I admit."

"Well, all I can say is that I am going to the fort upon a special mission, and my father being an army officer, I was brought up upon the frontier."

"I learned to ride and shoot long before I was in my teens, and so came ready for rough work when I started for Fort Faraway."

"I rode upon the box with your friend, and when he was suddenly ordered to halt by the road-agents, I saw that he intended to make a dash of it, and I gloried in his pluck."

"He called to his leaders, and they sprung forward, and then came several shots."

"The result was that the leaders dropped, and flight was impossible."

"Then these men appeared in the trail, all of them masked."

"The one who appeared to be the leader said: 'See here, Dick, it's your game to run us every time, and this is your last run.'"

"Take that!"

"With that he shot the poor driver dead, and then he turned to me and said: 'I happen to know that you have considerable money along with you.'"

"Was this true, miss?" asked On Time Charlie, calmly.

"It was, for I have quite a large sum in money with me."

"And the road-agents got it?" quickly asked Hank Leathers.

"They did not," was the cool reply.

"What?"

"You saved it?"

"I did."

"How could you?"

"I told them that it was in my sachel in the coach, and I tossed a key down to one, and the leader stepped to the coach door."

"Then I acted!"

"What did you do, miss?"

"I shot the leader dead, and also the one near him, while the man at the heads of the horses fled in terror."

"You shot them?" and both men gazed in wonder, awe and admiration at the woman who so calmly made this assertion.

"I did."

"Two of them?"

"Yes."

"Killed them?"

"Yes."

"And the third?"

"Got away."

"Did you fire at him?"

"No."

"Had I done so he would not have gotten away."

"Did he fire at you?"

"No, he seemed too much frightened at seeing a woman handle a revolver."

"I don't wonder, miss," said On Time Charlie.

"And then?" asked Hank Leathers.

"Well, as there were only three, two were dead and the other had run away, I got down from the box, cut the leaders loose and came on."

"Not knowing the trail I had to drive very slowly, and so I got in behind time and delayed your starting, sir."

"But the two dead men are back on the trail awaiting burial, and I am ready to go on now, On Time Charlie," and the lady passenger moved toward the coach.

CHAPTER X. THE HEIRESS.

ON TIME CHARLIE was beyond all doubt greatly taken with the fair passenger who was to be his companion on the way down to the fort.

He looked at her with a kind of amazed admiration in his glance, and as she signified a readiness to go on her way, he said, glancing at a handsome watch that he carried:

"I am ready, miss, and we start just three hours behind time."

"You appear to have no dread of the way, sir?"

"Why should I when you do not fear, miss?"

"But it is you, not I, that will be the one whose life is in danger."

"I have lived so long with death my boon companion, miss, that the thought of dying holds no terror for me."

"Only a brave man can say that, sir."

"Thank you."

"But let me aid you."

"No, I am not yet decrepit," and she swung herself gracefully up to the box, taking the seat from which the body of the dead driver had been taken a short while before.

Then On Time Charlie mounted to the box and the stable boys jumped back from the heads of the restive horses, whose patience had been sorely tried.

"Good-by, and a safe run to you, miss," called out Hank, and the horses dashed away.

That On Time Charlie was a splendid hand with the reins Miss Bell at once saw, for only a man of skill and nerve could have taken that flying team through the intricacies and dangers of the trail leading out of the station.

The horses were fretted with delay, and fairly flew, and it was with real admiration at his skill that Miss Bell sat gazing at the driver handle his team in the darkness of the night.

The horses did not seem inclined to slacken up until well on their way, and then On Time Charlie drew them down to a slower pace with the remark:

"You see we had just three hours to make up, miss, and I allus goes in on time if I kills ther critturs."

"We is ten miles from Station 2, and has already cut off twenty minutes."

"And you expect to make up the other two hours and forty minutes between here and the fort?"

"Oh, yes, miss."

"Then you must have been long on this road to know it so well."

"No, I hasn't been here very long, miss, but I knows it all ther same, every wheel-cut and hoof-track of it."

"Then you are not a regular borderman?"

"Well, miss, when it comes to that, I is, for I has passed considerable o' my days upon ther frontier."

"And you love the wild life?"

"Yas, miss."

"I did not catch your name, sir, when Mr. Leathers introduced us."

"On Time Charlie, miss."

"Oh, yes, I heard that, but not your real name."

"My dear lady, I only goes by ther name of On Time Charlie, for out here on ther plains ef I had a dozen Christian names ther boys would call me what they pleased."

The woman urged no further, for she saw that, for some reason best known to himself, the driver did not intend to make his name known, other than the one he went by among his comrades.

They rode on in silence for some time then, the passenger seeming to admire greatly the skill of the driver, for she saw that the trail was a rough and dangerous one.

At length she said:

"Are you often stopped by road-agents, sir?"

"Well, miss, they has been bad at times, and has made good hauls from the Government, the travelers and the comp'ny."

"And do they always kill to gain their ends?"

"They kills when they has to, miss—that is, when they can't get gold without the use of lead and steel."

"Well, I hope that I will not be robbed, for I have considerable money with me, and which I would not give up without a struggle."

"I can understand that, miss, after what you did on Dick Spaulding's coach; but it is dangerous to carry much money with you."

"Well, it is just this way, you see: I am an orphan and an heiress."

"I had a brother who left home long ago, and he was cut off from his fortune, and all left to me."

"But I loved my brother, and I knew that he was not to blame in the affair that drove him from home."

"So, as I am now mistress of my fortune and myself, I came here to look up my brother, and I feel certain I will find him, so I can share with him my inheritance."

"It is certainly very noble in you, miss; but you didn't bring all your fortune with you, for it don't do ter take all yer eggs ter market in one basket?"

A silvery laugh answered this, while the young girl said:

"All of my fortune?"

"Why, my good friend, I inherited a million dollars, and I only have about five thousand with me, to use in finding my brother."

CHAPTER XI.

A QUICK SHOT.

THERE was no doubt but that On Time Charlie was greatly impressed with the importance of his fair passenger, when he learned that she was worth a cool million dollars.

He had never carried such a treasure over the

Overland before, and he must be most careful with her.

Then, too, she had five thousand dollars in cash with her, and it would never do to let a lady passenger in his keeping be robbed of her money.

As they went along they talked together of various subjects until at last Miss Bell asked:

"Have you ever heard of my brother on the plains?"

"His name is Burton Bell."

"Burton Bell, miss?"

"Yes."

"I has heard of a Burt, and a Bell out here, and there is a soldier named Burton I know."

"What kind of a looking man was your brother, miss?"

"When he left home, now seven years ago, he was sixteen, and a fairly grown youth, with hair and eyes about like mine."

"He is five years older than I am, but we are said to bear a very close resemblance to each other."

The driver felt that he would have to take another time to discover just how Miss Bell looked, for in spite of its being dark she wore her veil.

The more he heard his passenger talk the more On Time Charlie became interested in her and admired her.

There was a certain richness in her low voice, added to a cadence that was very winning and her form was certainly elegant, her face, of which he had only obtained a glimpse, was most attractive.

"She'll raise a row out at the fort, that is certain, for all of the officers will fall in love with her, especially as she has a million to back her up."

"I'll go in myself to win, for I has the first call."

"I suppose it is all dull at the border fort, when there is no war going on?" asked Miss Bell.

"Well, we have war about all the time, miss, as the red-skins often make a dash in upon us."

"Then too the road-agents make it exciting on the trails, while there has been the devil ter pay, begging your pardon miss, o' late with ther mysterious killin' thet has been going on."

"What is that, may I ask?"

"Yer means ther killin', miss?" and On Time Charlie peered attentively into the darkness ahead of him.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, miss, it seems that thar is a avenger out fer scalps."

"Who is he?"

"Nobody knows."

"Does he kill any ore?"

"Well, I should remark, miss, for he's a terror on ther kill."

"First, there was a soldier kilt on his post one night, and not the slightest clew could be had as to who did it."

"That is strange."

"It's strangest, miss, thet he allus kills with a bowie-knife."

"Stabs his victims?"

"He must throw the knife at them, miss, for it looks as if he did, and all believes that he does."

"Can no one discover who he is?"

"Not a soul, miss."

"Does he leave no clew, no trail?"

"Well, no, miss, and yet he does, for he leaves his knife in the heart of his victim, and it is a clean-bladed bowie with a born handle, and in the latter is cut a number which is painted red."

"How many has he killed, may I ask?"

"So far, miss, just seven."

"All soldiers?"

"Yes, miss, and all when on sentinel duty."

"I should think they would be upon their guard."

"They are, miss, but somehow he gets in his red work all the same, and the soldiers are now getting very nervous over it."

"I should think so; but where are your scouts?"

"They have hunted for him until they are almost blind, looking for trails."

"Each time he comes on horseback, but after his work is done he turns his horse loose, and on foot leaves no trail."

"And his horses?"

"Have been picked up by the scouts, without saddle or bridle, and were found to have been stole from some camp, corral or settler's home not far away."

"This is remarkable."

"But see!"

It was just day-dawn, and suddenly a form stepped out before the heads of the leaders, and a stern voice called out:

"Halt!"

"Hands up all!"

But, ere the command had left the lips of the road-agent there was a quick movement of the girl's wrist, a flash, sharp report, and she had sent a bullet into the outlaw's brain, while she called out to On Time Charlie:

"Now drive for your life!"

CHAPTER XII.

A WOMAN OF NERVE.

IN spite of his nerve the driver was taken aback by the quick shot and deadly aim of the woman, followed by her command to drive on.

He hesitated, when she said in a voice that now rung out sternly:

"Drive on, I say! Do you wish others to capture us?"

The whip came suddenly down upon the horses and they sprung forward, dashing rapidly by the prostrate form of the road-agent.

But no other shots came, no sound was heard to indicate that there were others than the one who had halted them.

With this belief, On Time Charlie drew rein and said:

"You hold ther critturs, miss, and I'll go back and bring that dead pilgrim, ter shew what yer did."

"I won't be long, miss, for he's just around the bend."

With this, On Time Charlie dismounted from his box and went at a quick pace back along the trail.

In less than ten minutes he was seen coming back, bearing upon his broad shoulders the dead form of the robber.

"Whar did yer aim fer, miss?" he called out.

"You'll find my bullet struck him between the eyes," was the cool reply.

"Sart'in, miss, for thar is whar ther lead went in."

"I'll put him on top, unless yer don't like ter see him, and if so, he rides inside as a passenger."

"It makes no difference to me, sir."

"Then on top he goes, miss."

With this, On Time Charlie mounted upon one of the rear wheels and tossed the dead body upon top of the coach.

The man was roughly dressed, wore a mask and was well armed.

Having resumed his seat, as it was now dawn, On Time Charlie pushed rapidly on to the next relay station.

At the mountain corral other horses were quickly hitched up and the drive became a rapid one.

In two hours more the next relay was reached, and On Time Charlie said:

"Just forty minutes to make up, miss."

Away went the fresh team, and they were kept at their work with no stops.

"There is the fort, miss, and I have just three minutes to make up," and the driver looked at his watch.

"On Time Charlie, I can now well understand how you got your name."

"You started behind time, lost more time on the road, and are now arriving just when due."

"I makes it a rule allus to be on time, miss, though the team has had a hard run of it."

A moment after he drew rein before the stage station at the fort and was greeted with a cheer.

"Any news, Charlie?" asked one.

"Only this!" and he handed down the outlaw's body, while he also aided the lady to alight.

A murmur went up from the crowd at sight of the dead form of the road-agent, and On Time Charlie was at once besieged by all with questions:

"Who is he, Charlie?"

"Where did you kill him?"

"Did you get any more of them?"

"Did they rob your coach?"

"Where were you bold up?"

"See here, pards, I hain't no catechism, and yer must go slow."

"I didn't kill him, and instid o' holdin' us up he went down."

"Now, as yer sees, I has a lady passenger ter look arter, and don't yer fergit it, she's a dandy."

"Come, miss, and I'll escort yer ter headquarters, and ther colonel will git yer pleasant rooms."

With this he led the way to the colonel's quarters.

Colonel Emmett was a most courtly gentleman, as well as a good soldier, so, seeing a lady arose to meet her.

"Colonel, this is Miss Bell, and a woman with ther narve o' ther devil."

"Miss Bell, this is Colonel Emmett, the commandant of the post, and a gent clean through."

"I am glad to welcome you, Miss Bell, to the fort, so pray tell me how I can serve you?" said Colonel Emmett, after On Time Charlie had concluded his double introduction.

"I am here, sir, upon a special mission, and as I may be detained for some time, I would like to just ask you if you will be good enough to assign me to quarters."

"Here is a letter to you, sir, from General S—."

"She deserves ther best, colonel, as yer'll know when I tells yer that Dick Spaulding's coach were held up, Dick were kilt, with two of his horses, and then this lady o' narve chipped in, slayed a couple o' ther outlaws, and druv ther coach inter Station 2, by night, while, when with me, a solitary road-agent held us up, and before I c'u'd say a word she shot him, and I brought in ther cadaver as proof."

"Oh, yes, she's got grit."

"I should indeed say, Miss Bell, that you are a woman of nerve, and a heroine as well," said the colonel, amazed at the report On Time Charlie had to make of his passenger.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COLONEL'S GUEST.

FEELING that he had done his duty, On Time Charlie took his departure, leaving Emma Bell at headquarters.

The colonel led her into his office and presented to her several officers who were there, while he sent an orderly to request his wife to come to headquarters.

Mrs. Emmett, a sweet-faced, pleasant little lady soon appeared, and being introduced to the stranger, at once said:

"I shall be most happy, Miss Bell, to have you as our guest while you remain, for General S—, the colonel says, tells us to take the very best care of you."

"But you were on the coach when it was held up, I heard from the orderly, so must have had a severe shock."

"Oh, no, for I am not easily frightened," was the quiet reply, and then, at the request of Colonel Emmett, Miss Bell told of her double adventure in coming to the fort.

All looked at her in amazement, and Mrs. Emmett in almost awe.

There was a lovely young girl, for she had removed her veil now, with a face that was refined and sad looking, a voice that was almost plaintive in tone, who had defended herself and avenged poor Dick Spaulding's death most promptly.

Hers had been no random fire under excitement, for On Time Charlie had said that the shots were dead center ones, right between the eyes each time.

Then, too, she had fired another fatal shot when held up on On Time Charlie's coach, and ridden on to the fort with the corpse which her hand had made.

A strange woman certainly, young, lovely in face and form, gentle in manner yet a heroine and dangerous to arouse, as she had proven most thoroughly.

Having told her story in a way that was most modest, and showed regret at having to take human life, she continued:

"I may as well now tell you, Colonel Emmett, why I came to the fort to ask your aid."

"I am in search of a brother who ran away from home some years ago when but a youth."

"He was wronged, yet it did not appear so until long after, and he was disinherited by my parents of the fortune that should have been his."

"All was left to me, and I am determined to find him and share with him the inheritance, which is a very large one."

"I have had detectives upon the case and he has been tracked to this part of the frontier, and I have reason to believe is either a soldier, scout or miner on the border."

"Such is my story, Colonel Emmett, and I am well prepared to spend all money necessary to find him, and to offer a very liberal reward for any one bringing me news of him."

"My God! what if he be the Boy Scout, Kit Kent!" flashed through the mind of the colonel, causing him to turn very pale.

But he said aloud:

"I am more than glad to entertain you, Miss Bell, and Mrs. Emmett is also."

"Your story interests me greatly, and I shall do all in my power to find your brother, for

your sake as well as his, while you deserve all the aid we can give you for having rid the country of three at least of its worst desperadoes."

"Now you need rest, so go with Mrs. Emmett to our home, and I will have your baggage sent there at once."

"At dinner I will see you again, and afterward we can talk over this whole affair and just what is best to be done in the matter."

When Emma Bell had gone with Mrs. Emmett, there was a general outburst of praise of her pluck, nerve and beauty.

"I shall have to guard her very closely from you young and old fortune-hunters, now she has unfortunately made known that she is rich," said the colonel with a smile, and his reply brought from Captain Abner Ainsley, who was present, the remark:

"Well, I confess, colonel, if I could marry a fortune, securing with it such a woman as Miss Bell, I should be most ready to resign from the army and settle down to enjoy life."

"I do not doubt that in the least, Ainsley, and there are more of your way of thinking."

"But there will be a spirited rivalry against you, and I say may the best man win," was the half serious response of a handsome young lieutenant aide-de-camp of the colonel, and by name Grover Garfield.

From that day the prophecy of a spirited rivalry became fulfilled, for "the colonel's guest" was the toast among all the officers at the fort, for she at once found herself a most popular heroine.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FATAL POST.

It was the very night following the arrival of Miss Bell at the fort that, at midnight, an alarm rung out and soldiers sprung to arms as the long roll resounded through the barracks.

What could it mean?

Were the Indians coming to attack in force?

So 'most all believed.

But very soon the officer of the day appeared at headquarters.

"What is it, Tomlinson?" asked the colonel, who had been aroused and hastened to his quarters.

"Another soldier slain, sir."

"Ah! in a quarrel?"

"No, sir, a sentinel on his post."

"What! another victim of that mysterious assassin?"

"Yes, sir."

"Killed outright?"

"Yes, sir."

"The ninth?"

"Yes, sir, he is number nine."

"This is remarkable."

"Who is he?"

"Private Dockery, sir, of the Seventh Infantry, B Company."

"Ainsley's company?"

"Yes, sir."

"This is the fifth man from his company that has been killed in the same unfathomable way."

"Yes, sir, and by a bowie-knife, which I drew from his breast."

"It is here, sir," and Captain Tomlinson unwrapped from a newspaper a long-bladed bowie-knife.

The handle was weighted, and of horn, and in the latter was carved, and then dyed red, the letters:

"NUMBER NINE."

"Have you any theory of this strange killing, Tomlinson?"

"None, sir."

"What post was the poor fellow on?"

"Number One, sir, and I fear I shall have to leave several men there."

"No, no, do not do that, as it might be demoralizing to the men."

"State your regret at having to place a man there alone, and then call for one of the guard to volunteer to remain."

"I will, sir, and I leave the knife in your keeping."

"Yes, for I have the others, and do you know I believe they were all made for the purpose they have been used for, the handles being weighted, so as to throw them, for all were thrown."

"Beyond a doubt, sir."

"I have asked for a man, or men, to be sent me from the Government Secret Service Bureau at Washington, to try and unravel this mystery, but, excepting a reply that a man should be at once dispatched to the fort I have had no reply."

"But he has not come, sir?"

"No, and I am getting most anxious about his doing so, for this avenging Nemesis must not be allowed longer to keep up his red work."

"No, sir."

"But I will return to the post, sir, which I left to acquaint you with what had happened."

With this, Captain Tomlinson returned to Post Number One.

The relief guard was there, and a company of soldiers as well, while a dozen scouts stood about, wondering what to do.

Upon the ground, covered by a blanket, lay the dead form of the sentinel, still clasping his musket.

When the officer of the day returned, the scouts at once reported that the assassin had gotten up to the edge of the ridge, and from there thrown the fatal knife, and they would at once go off on the search for him, hoping to find some trace when daylight came.

The scouts were at once dispatched to see what they could discover, the company was marched back to its barracks, and Captain Tomlinson, after a few words to the relief guard, asked for a volunteer to take the post.

One man promptly stepped forward, the one whose duty it would have been to relieve his dead comrade, while he said:

"I am not shirking my duty, sir, because my comrades have been killed in a mysterious way. I am ready to take my chances on the post, sir."

A murmur of applause greeted this and Captain Tomlinson said:

"You are a brave fellow, Duncan, and I will report your desire not to shirk duty in the face of an assassin's knife."

"Take your post and keep a bright watch, though I do not anticipate more deadly work to-night."

The soldier took his post, the body of the dead man was borne away and the post, the furthest one from the fort, and which had proven so fatal to others, was held by Duncan, while the fort quieted down once more in deep repose.

Thus the hours passed away and once more the relief guard was upon its rounds.

It moved along the ridge toward the position where Duncan stood, and approaching there came no command "halt!" from the sentinel.

In alarm the corporal halted his men, advanced a step or so and called out sharply:

"Sentinel of Post Number One!"

No reply followed. The corporal advanced still further, when his feet touched a form in the darkness, and with a cry he started back, calling out:

"Private Duncan is dead!"

"He, too, has been assassinated by this mysterious avenger!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

AGAIN the long roll resounded through the fort, startling all from their slumbers, and the troops went on a double-quick to their posts of duty, for they knew not what moment a rush of red-skins might be made.

Then came the order to return to their quarters, as the trouble was again at Post Number One.

A second time that night, at that fatal post, had a sentinel been slain on duty.

Once more Colonel Emmett arose and went to his official headquarters, where he was met by his aide, Lieutenant Grover Garfield.

"What is it now, Garfield?"

"Post Number One, sir."

"What! a second time to-night?"

"Yes, sir; but here comes Captain Tomlinson."

His coming was eagerly awaited, and his face was pale as he threw himself down in a chair.

"Private Duncan, sir, of A Company, Seventh Infantry, has been killed at Post Number One, colonel, the second murder to-night."

"This is appalling, captain."

"Was he killed as before?"

"Yes, sir; here is the knife, sir."

The colonel took the knife, and then saw the number and the long blade, with the handle weighted at the hilt.

"Yes, a *fac-simile* of the other knives, except that this bears the number *Ten*."

"Yes, colonel, ten victims have fallen by the hand of this mysterious and merciless avenger."

"And we can find no trace of the assassin?"

"None, sir."

"I sent out nine scouts from the post, and they were to move about near until dawn, yet, in spite of their presence near, the murder was committed."

"Were the scouts near, though?"

"They were so near, sir, that every one of

them reached the post before I did, and were astounded when they heard the alarm of the long roll."

"What did they say?"

"They said that some of them were within a couple of hundred yards of the post, concealed in the timber."

"And they saw no one?"

"Neither saw or heard any one, sir, until the alarm came."

"Was the soldier a volunteer?"

"No, sir, the man who was to go on duty, for he would not shirk the danger he said."

"A brave fellow; but I wish I had allowed you to put others there?"

"It would, as you said, sir, have demoralized the men, being a confession of fear."

"I can, however, have the post watched by scouts in hiding, the soldiers not knowing of their presence near."

"Yes, sir, that will be a good plan."

"I will also send a courier to-morrow with a message to be wired to Washington, hurrying on my man from there, for I have great faith in detectives."

"As I have, sir."

"And we will have a council of officers to-morrow and discuss the whole situation about this most unfortunate, nay appalling state of affairs."

It was after an early breakfast that the council of officers was called by the colonel at his quarters.

All felt the gravity of the situation, and that this avenging Nemesis must be hunted down at once.

The views of each and every officer were asked and given, the colonel hoping that some one of them might suggest a clue, or evolve a plan of action to capture the criminal.

The council lasted for several hours, and it was decided that the guards should all be doubled, only one sentinel however remaining visible, the second one in hiding, while the outpost Number One, now known as "The Fatal Post," should, in addition to the two sentries, have several scouts in hiding and on the watch.

The scouts had come in one by one and each had the same report to make, that this time the assassin had not been mounted, but on foot, for no trace whatever of a trail could be found, leading to or from Post Number One.

That the soldiers were becoming alarmed, the different captains reported, and the doubling of the sentinels would have a beneficial effect upon them all assured.

Having decided upon their plans the officers took their leave, when the colonel arose and began to pace to and fro.

Extending his walk into the back parlor he started as he beheld seated at the window, his wife's easel before her, and complacently sketching the scene before her, none other than Miss Bell.

"Ah, Miss Bell, you here?" he cried in surprise.

"Why, did you not know it, colonel?"

"I hope I have not offended, or overheard anything not intended for other ears than your officers'?"

"No, no, so do not worry, for really, no state secrets were discussed, and I guess I will have, after all, to ask your advice in this mysterious business of an avenger being upon the track of my men," said the colonel, taking a seat by her side.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FAIR ALLY.

"ANYTHING I can say or do to help you, Colonel Emmett, command me," was the answer of Emma Bell.

"Then, as you seem only to have made a few strokes with your pencil, I will interrupt you and tell you the whole story, for twice were we called to arms last night by the sounding of the long roll."

"Yes, I was awakened each time, sir."

"But I must tell you, as you say you are going to ask my advice, that instead of sketching the past two hours, I have been taking notes."

"Taking notes?"

"See!"

She held out a number of scraps of paper as she spoke, upon each of which was written in short-hand a name, and beneath some comments.

"Why, these are the opinions expressed by my officers, for I am a stenographer," said the colonel, in surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"And you took them down?"

"I did, sir."

"May I ask for what purpose, Miss Bell?"

"I had half a notion, sir, that you would see me as an ally, and I wished to be posted."

"Now see if I can help you."

"Pray do if you can," said the bewildered officer.

"Here, sir, Lieutenant-Colonel Varney says that he believes that the murderer is a soldier, who is a monomaniac on the subject of revenge, and is killing the fellow-soldiers whom he holds the slightest grudge against."

"Not a bad idea, now that I think of it, and I recall that Varney did say so, while others laughed at it."

"Yes, sir, and Major Shipman said that he believed, in spite of the knives found in the hearts of the victims, that Indians were the assassins."

"Yes, and but for the knives and numbers I would feel the same way."

"Buck Taylor, your chief of scouts, sir, on the other hand, asserted that no red-skins were, or had been, near the fort, and that the Sioux would have scalped their victims."

"Yes, and I must say, now that these opinions are reviewed, and are read, they are valuable, in that they give me a train of thought I had not dwelt upon before."

"I am glad, Miss Bell, that you were so thoughtful as to put them down."

"I am happy in not having displeased you, sir, in so doing."

"But here come the opinions of your captains."

"Yes."

"Captain Tuell said that outlaws were the murderers of the sentinels."

"Yes."

"Captain Jerome remarked as his opinion that there was an avenger in the camps who was taking the lives of the sentries."

"I do not believe that."

"Captain Clark thought that it might be a woman, the one you call the Border Borgia."

"Ha! that is an idea that escaped me, and the woman is dangerous—having several times taken life."

"I regard her, too, as a bad woman."

"Captain Tomlinson, colonel, remarked that his belief was in a soldier Nemesis, one who was avenging some wrong done him, and it would be well to look for just such a man among the commands."

"Yes, and I asked him to take the duty upon himself."

"Yes, sir."

"But now come other opinions more or less important, or suggestive, which I will read you, so please make a note of any that strikes you particularly, sir, as being of value."

"I will."

Then Miss Bell read down the list, and several times the colonel halted as he deemed some good point was contained in the opinion of an officer.

At last Miss Bell said:

"Now, here is one opinion, colonel, which I have kept until the last, though perhaps you may not see anything in it at a glance."

"Yes, whose is it?"

"Captain Ainsley's, sir."

"Ah! but how did you get all the names so well?"

"As you asked each one for an expression of opinion, sir, I heard the name and wrote it down, following with what he said."

"True, but what was Ainsley's opinion, for I forget now, and he is generally very clear-headed, while let me again thank you, Miss Bell, for keeping those notes."

"I am glad to have served you, sir."

"But the opinion expressed by Captain Ainsley, you may now recall, was not coincided in by any one else present, as he said that he believed that the assassin was avenging the execution of one of whom he spoke as the Boy Scout, Kit Kent."

"Yes, I recall his words now, and cannot see why an avenger of the death of that poor boy should attack my soldiers."

"May I ask, sir, if the boy was executed?"

"Yes."

"Shot?"

"He was."

"By whom?"

"A platoon of soldiers under command of Captain Ainsley, and by my orders."

"Colonel Emmett, have you taken the steps to ascertain if the sentinels slain were the ones who formed that execution squad?" was the startling question of Miss Bell.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WOMAN'S WORK.

THE words of Miss Bell were a surprise to the colonel.

They set him to thinking.

After some little time, spent in racing to and fro, he said:

"Miss Bell, the execution of that boy I regret more than any scene of my life."

"But the road-agents were murdering right and left, robbing the coaches of treasure belonging to the Government, and o money of the passengers, and so systematic was their work that we became convinced that they had a spy in the camp, in fact that there was some one in the fort, close to headquarters, who was posting them when to strike the coaches."

Spies were set to catch them, and an anonymous letter, recieved by Captain Ainsley, pointed suspicion upon a youth who seemed scarcely eighteen years of age.

"He was known as the Boy Scout, and answered to the name of Kit Kent, and a brave, handsome little fellow he was."

"He was watched, owing to the reception of this anonymous letter, and the result was that he was seen to leave a note at a certain point, and soon after it was taken from there by a horseman who was masked."

"The next day this masked horseman held up On Time Charlie's coach, killed the guard and robbed the Government."

"The boy was arrested, but would give no explanation of his conduct."

"He asked a week to prove his innocence, and I gave him two."

"He did not prove his innocence, and hence, obeying my orders from the general, I sentenced him to be hanged."

"He begged to be shot, and I yielded."

"Here is the letter he wrote me."

"Read it."

The colonel went to his private desk and got the letter written him by Kit Kent.

Handing it to the maiden she read it through very carefully, here and there making a note of it.

Then she said:

"And what else, colonel?"

"The boy's last requests I respected, he was shot, and they were carried out faithfully."

"How many were in the platoon of execution, sir?"

"Sixteen."

"They were detailed for the work?"

"No, the men detailed begged off, so volunteers were called for."

"Ah!"

"And these were the men who volunteered?"

"Sixteen?"

"Yes."

"Was that not rather a large platoon for an execution?"

"Yes, but it was the Boy Scout's request."

"I see."

"Now let me ask if any attempt has been made upon Captain Ainsley's life?"

"None."

"Why did the boy wish him to be his executioner, sir?"

"I have since heard it said that a soldier overheard something that passed between the youth and Captain Ainsley, and that they were known to each other before the boy came to the fort."

"That may be, sir; but I do not yet see the boy's motive in wishing to have an old friend become his executioner."

"From what I heard they were not old friends, but rather foes."

"Then I can better understand the boy's request, sir."

"Now will you get the list of men who were in that platoon of executioners, and the names of the men thus far killed and see if they are one and the same?"

The colonel arose quickly, went to the door, gave his orderly an order and returned.

"I believe you are getting upon the right track, Miss Bell, and I am more than ever convinced that it takes a woman to unravel a skein of thread and a mystery."

"Thank you, Colonel Emmett, but I believe women are so constituted that they look further into anything of a suspicious nature than men do."

The orderly returned with two slips of paper, given him by the adjutant.

One was a list of the sixteen men who composed the execution platoon which had shot to death Kit Kent.

The other list was the names of the ten men who had been so mysteriously assassinated on duty, seven of them having been killed at Post Number One.

The colonel read the platoon names aloud, and handing the other list to Miss Bell said:

"Please mark the names on your list, if any are there, as I call them."

This Miss Bell did, and when the colonel had

called the roll of sixteen names she said quietly, but with a certain look of triumph upon her face:

"There are ten of those names, sir, that comprise the death list."

"Yes, it is to avenge the Boy Scout that these murders are committed."

"And this a woman has discovered for us," warmly said the colonel.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CAPTAIN'S MISSION.

"WELL, Miss Bell, your value as a detective, I recognize with pleasure, and I am more than happy to have you as my ally in solving these mysterious assassinations."

"Now let us see what more you can discover," said the colonel.

"Will you first send for Captain Ainsley, sir, not allow him to know that I am an eavesdropper, and tell him what discovery you have made?"

"Certainly."

"There is an alcove where you can see and not be seen, while you can hear all."

"I will send for him at once."

The orderly was dispatched for Captain Abner Ainsley and soon returned with that officer.

"Ainsley, I sent for you to talk over this affair of these murdered sentinels."

"Talking it over, colonel, does not seem to bring us any nearer a solution of the case."

"I am not so sure of that, for your idea about the death of the Boy Scout is about right, I find!"

The officer started, but quickly asked:

"How do you mean, Colonel Emmett?"

"Here is a list I had prepared of the men who have been slain."

"Yes, sir."

"And here is a list of the men on your execution platoon."

"Yes, sir."

"Ten names, those of the assassinated soldiers, are on that list."

"My God! can this be so, colonel?"

"It is."

"Here is the list, so look for yourself."

The officer's hand had a slight tremor in it as he looked over the list, and then he said:

"It is true, sir, for those sixteen men and myself are all doomed."

"Why yourself, Ainsley, do you think?"

"It was the boy's request that I became his executioner, you said."

"It was."

"The men of the platoon were all volunteers?"

"Yes."

"Well, colonel, I desire to say to you that I know all about that boy."

"You do?"

"Yes, sir; he belonged to a good family, and ran away from home after leading a very wild life for a youth of his years."

"He had a sister, his twin, whom I met and loved."

"She refused the offer of my love, as she had become infatuated with a man who had rendered her father and herself some valuable service."

"She discovered that her hero was an ex-convict, I have heard, and I sought again to see her and press my suit."

"To my surprise I found in Kit Kent her twin brother."

"I sought all in my power to save the boy, but in vain."

"He believed that I could do so, but was revengeful against him because his sister had refused my love."

"But this was not the case, I assure you."

"Still, believing that I was his foe he became revengeful, and so wished me to be the officer in command of his execution."

"Now, I believe, he seeks revenge upon me from his grave, and some one is carrying out his revengeful wishes, doubtless the road-agents with whom he had leagued himself."

"It is hard to believe, Ainsley."

"But where is his sister now?"

"At her home, on her ranch, and I would like to ask leave to go there, sir."

"If you wish, of course, yes."

"I would know if she was aware of her brother's fate, and see if she was the instigator of this revengeful work against his executioners."

"If so, you run great risks in going, Captain Ainsley."

"I will take the chances, sir; but I shall be glad to learn all, if only for my own satisfaction."

"Then, go."

"When will you start?"

"To-morrow, sir."

"You wish an escort?"

"No, sir, I will go in On Time Charlie's coach, sir."

"What is your real motive for wishing to go to this lady's home, may I ask, captain?"

After a moment of thought, Captain Ainsley responded:

"To see, sir, if I can find any clew to these revengeful murders, if they originate with his people."

"It can hardly be possible in one whom you say you desire to make your wife."

"Women are strange creatures, sir, and where their affections are concerned one never knows what they will do."

"It may be so with some, captain; but all women are no more alike than are all men."

"Well, colonel, I have a longing to see, now I know that there is no doubt but that the boy's death is being avenged, if the avenger was started upon his red trail from the home of his sister."

"Very well, try and find out."

"When will you start?"

"With the next coach, sir."

"And when return?"

"Within a couple of weeks, sir."

The colonel bowed and the captain departed, when Miss Bell came out of her place of concealment and said:

"Colonel Emmett, will you place a detective upon the track of Captain Ainsley to oblige me?"

CHAPTER XIX.

A SUSPICION.

COLONEL EMMETT was greatly surprised at the remark of Miss Bell.

"Surely, Miss Bell, you have no reason for suspecting Captain Ainsley in this matter?" he said with surprise.

"I will tell you, sir, just what I wish to find out."

"Well?"

"He told you that he knew this boy?"

"Yes."

"That he loved his sister."

"True."

"He did not tell you the boy's real name?"

"No."

"Nor say where the sister lived, or who she was?"

"He did not."

"The boy felt unkindly toward the captain for some motive."

"It would seem so."

"Asking that he should be his executioner?"

"Yes."

"Now, ten of the sixteen men who were in the execution platoon have been killed."

"Yes."

"This would indicate that those now alive are doomed?"

"Yes, it would appear so."

"And of course the captain?"

"Ah!"

"If he goes he may be killed, may be led into a trap, so I would like to ask you if you have a reliable man whom you can send with him to shadow him, not, of course, allowing the captain to know that he was being shadowed."

"But why not let him know that he has help near him should he have need of it?"

"It might be a clog upon his movements, Colonel Emmett, and besides, if he does need help, he will have it near without knowing it."

"True."

"But you have some other motive in this, Miss Bell?"

"I have, sir."

"Will you tell me?"

"Certainly, for we must work together in this Secret Service trail."

"I am already discovering how very valuable your services are."

"Thank you, sir."

"But this other motive?"

"It is that your shadower may find out for you just who this youth was, this lady is, and why the boy left his home."

"I see."

"This will give you the advantage of knowing all about them, and getting both Captain Ainsley's statements and your shadower's."

"Good!"

"With the double report in your possession, you will be master of the situation."

"Yes, but how can this man go and not be recognized by the captain?"

"Who did you have in mind, sir, to send?"

"A soldier who was over on the Rocky Mountain detective force under Dave Cook."

"A good man doubtless, sir."

"Yes, I think so."

"Then give him a leave and let him start on the coach with Captain Ainsley, presumably on his way home."

"If he has been a detective he knows how to disguise himself and can do so, and thus shadow the captain to where he goes."

"By changing his disguises he can keep near him, and thus learn all there is to know, and more, be on hand to protect him should the occasion arise."

"You were born for a detective yourself, Miss Bell," said the colonel with admiration, and the maiden replied simply:

"Sometimes I have thought that I was, sir."

"You know that in looking up my lost brother I am following up a Secret Service trail?"

"Yes, and I believe that you will meet with success, though there is little aid that I can render you in your search, I fear."

"I do not know about that, sir."

"There is a belief in my mind, Miss Bell, that you hold some suspicion against Captain Ainsley, but of what I am unable to say."

"It is well to suspect one, sir, to watch one well; but the captain I suspect in that there appears to be, through him, some motive for this deadly revenge."

"It would seem so."

"Now, what brought the boy to the fort?"

"I do not know."

"Might he not have come here on a revengeful errand?"

"Ah!"

"Did you find out who sent that anonymous letter, which was the cause for suspecting the Boy Scout?"

"I did not."

"Where is it, sir?"

"I have it among the papers on the case."

"Would it not be well to examine it, sir?"

"For what motive?"

"To trace the writer."

"It would do no good now."

"It might, sir."

"In what respect?"

"If the writer was discovered then it brings into the case another person who might be connected with these midnight murders."

"I had not looked at it that way."

"I will get the letter and to-night we will go over it most carefully, if you care to."

"I should be most pleased to do so, colonel, for I am becoming most deeply interested in this case of the Boy Scout, I assure you," was the answer of Miss Bell.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN DETECTIVE.

THE fair detective who was so ably aiding Colonel Emmett in the mystery of the midnight murders of the sentinels, asked, after a silence of some minutes, in which she had appeared to be lost in deep meditation:

"Have you any objection, colonel, to my seeing the man you intend to send to shadow the captain?"

"Not in the least."

"I should like to very much."

"I will send for him at once."

"Then let me take my hiding-place again in the curtained alcove, for I do not wish to be seen by him."

"May I ask why?" and the colonel smiled.

"Yes, because I wish to read his face."

"Would he not look the same if you were here?"

"No, sir, for a man never wears the same expression upon his face before a woman that he does when he believes he has only to face men."

"I almost believe you are right."

"I know I am."

"I am learning much from you, Miss Bell."

"You are an apt pupil, sir."

"And you a finished teacher."

"Thank you, sir; but now tell me who this man is?"

"I only know that he was a Rocky Mountain detective and enlisted in the army several years ago."

"What is his name, sir?"

"Kendrick, Carter Kendrick, and he is now a sergeant of ordnance."

The colonel sent the orderly for ordnance sergeant Carter Kendrick, and in a short while the soldier entered.

He was a man of medium height, wiry and athletic in build, and had a full beard and hair worn somewhat long in imitation of the scout.

He was neat in dress, upright and soldierly, and his face was full of courage and determination, at the same time being intelligent.

"Sergeant Kendrick, I have sent for you for a special service."

"Yes, sir," and the sergeant saluted and looked straight toward the alcove where Miss Bell was concealed, though he neither saw her nor suspected her being there.

"You were a member of Dave Cook's Rocky Mountain Detective League?"

"Yes, sir."

"For how long?"

"Six years."

"Before that what was your occupation?"

"I was a lawyer, sir, but study broke me down and I came to the plains, as the doctors said a life in the city would kill me, sir."

"Why did you leave the Detective League when the pay was ten times that of a soldier?"

"I have a small income, sir, and I had an ambition to rise in the army to a commission, sir."

"Well, you have begun well to become an ordnance sergeant in three years."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now I wish you to go upon a special duty, and I will make a good report in your behalf, if you accomplish what I desire."

"I will do my best, sir."

"Captain Ainsley starts with On Time Charlie's coach to go on a special mission."

"It has been discovered that the men who were killed by this unknown avenger are those of the execution platoon that shot the Boy Scout."

"I had taken note of that, sir."

"You had?"

"Yes, sir, but I supposed you knew of it, so made no report of it to you, sir."

"I wish that you had done so."

"But though I send you with Captain Ainsley he is not to know it."

"I understand, sir."

"You are to state that you are on leave, and, as soon as you can do so pretend to leave him, and disguising yourself keep near him."

"Shadow him, sir, in fact?"

"Yes."

"I will, sir, and be near to protect him if need be."

"Yes, go well prepared for that and I will supply you amply with funds."

"But you are to keep a journal of where you go, all he does, the names of those he meets, and when he returns to come back with him, if you can do so without being suspected by him."

"I can, sir, for I am good at disguises."

"Now you understand your duties?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Take this order to the paymaster who will give you the money, and then get ready to start when the captain does."

"I'll be ready, sir."

"There is no need to tell you, Kendrick, that you are not to speak of this?"

"No, indeed, sir."

Soon after the sergeant departed, to prepare for his journey, and Miss Bell came out of her alcove.

"Well, my lady detective, what do you think of Sergeant Kendrick?" asked the colonel.

"A man who will do just what he says he will, and whom you can wholly rely upon, sir."

"He has talent as a detective, intelligence, pluck and determination, and can readily disguise his face and form I am sure."

"I am glad that you are pleased with him," said the colonel, and then Miss Bell went out to join Mrs. Emmett in a ride.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ANONYMOUS LETTER.

MISS BELL had brought with her to the fort her riding-habit.

It was a black one, trimmed with silver lace and buttons, and fitted her perfectly.

She wore a slouch hat and gilt cord, a heavy plume fell back upon her left shoulder, and the moment she mounted all saw that she was at home in the saddle.

She had learned to ride in the South, she said, so had not the abominable English way of rising in her stirrup.

Mrs. Emmett was a good rider also, and as escort the ladies had the major of infantry and the colonel's aide-de-camp.

The colonel saw them ride off and said to himself:

"A splendid horsewoman, and a wonder to me generally."

"I am strangely influenced by her, and I would give much to find that brother of hers, though it would rob her of half her fortune, and he may be a worthless fellow by this time."

"Well, she has given me food for thought, that is certain."

As Miss Bell expressed a desire to visit the fatal outpost, the major went that way from the fort.

The ground where the sentinel stood at a present, as they rode up, was yet stained with blood.

Miss Bell took in the scene very quietly, glanced about her like one making mental notes, and then rode on.

They took quite a long ride, and upon their return heard the muffled drums which told them that the two sentinels were being taken to their last resting-place.

They rode slowly up to the scene and beheld the chaplain read the burial service, saw the volley fired over the graves, and then joined the colonel and started back with him to the fort.

"Where is the grave of the Boy Scout, Colonel Emmett?" asked Miss Bell.

"Have you a desire to see it, Miss Bell?"

"I confess to a sad curiosity in that quarter, sir."

"I will take you there."

"Come, wife, we will go around by the Boy Scout's grave, as Miss Bell wishes to see it."

Mrs. Emmett willingly consented, and as they drew near, Miss Bell suddenly slipped from her saddle, tossed her bridle-rein to the lieutenant and glided toward the grave.

The colonel remained in his saddle, and checked the lieutenant as he sought to follow her.

They saw her go to the grave, then, after gazing at it an instant walk slowly around it. Then she stooped and closely examined the carved head-board.

Returning to her horse, unvailed, she placed her gloved hand upon the pommel and leaped into her saddle as an athlete only could do.

"Why, Miss Bell, you are as skillful as a circus rider!" laughed the colonel.

"Perhaps I once belonged to a circus, sir," was the smiling reply.

"But I thank you all for your kindness in gratifying my whim to visit the Boy Scout's grave."

After dinner that night there was company at the colonel's, many calling upon their commandant's guest, and it was late before they retired.

Miss Bell had shown herself an accomplished musician, playing delightfully upon the piano, and in a deep contralto voice singing several ballads.

She had taken up a silver cornet belonging to the colonel, and to the surprise of all ran through all the calls, and played "Taps" with pathos that was touching.

"What a strange woman you are Miss Bell," said the colonel, as he and his wife sat with her after the departure of their guests.

"Yes, and you will think me still stranger when you know me better, sir."

"But about that anonymous letter?"

"Oh, yes, but you are not too tired to look it over to-night?"

"No, indeed, sir."

The colonel stepped to his desk and got the letter.

It was written in a cramped hand, and badly spelled, but upon a sheet of fine note-paper.

"Here is an incongruity at once, sir."

"What is that?"

"The man who was so ignorant as to write such a letter would not have written it upon fine note-paper."

"Ah!"

"He would have written it upon rough paper of some kind, such as he would have had about him."

"It would seem so."

"And an ignorant man would have misspelled certain words here spelled correctly, and vice versa, Colonel Emmett."

"What a critic you are, Miss Bell."

"But she is right, Charles," said Mrs. Emmett.

"I can believe that, my dear."

"Colonel Emmett, this letter was written by an educated person, and the writing and spelling were purposely disguised."

"You think so?"

"I know so, sir," was the determined reply of Miss Bell.

CHAPTER XXII.

MORE LIGHT.

COLONEL and Mrs. Emmett watched the young girl in silence as she went over the anonymous letter.

She seemed to follow each curve of the writing, held the letter up to the light and saw a water-print upon it.

"Colonel Emmett, may I ask you a few questions?"

"Certainly."

"Who writes upon note-paper here of this kind?"

"I will look over my notes and see," said Mrs. Emmett, and at last she brought out a host of them.

Searching through them she came across several of like kind of paper with that the anonymous letter was written upon.

"They are acceptances from Captain Stanhope for dinner and card parties," said Mrs. Emmett.

"Captain Stanhope I met to-night?"

"Yes."

"He said that his chum, Captain Ainsley, was going to be away for a few weeks and he would miss him greatly."

"Yes, they are devoted friends, and Ainsley spends half of his time in Stanhope's quarters," Colonel Emmett said.

"Does Captain Stanhope use a stylographic pen in his writing, do you know?"

"I do not, though Ainsley does."

"These notes, Mrs. Emmett, were written with a quill pen."

"Yes, I remember now that Captain Stanhope always uses a quill."

"And Ainsley a stylographic?"

"Well, I recall hearing him say that he felt lost since his stylographic pen was broken."

"Does any one else use one that you know of, colonel?"

"I do not think so, for they are very rare."

"This anonymous note, Colonel Emmett, was written with a stylographic pen," quietly said Miss Bell.

"Indeed?"

"But how can you tell that?"

"See the shading here of Captain Stanhope's quill pen, and in your other notes you observe the steel pen, the gold pen and the indelible pencil used, as you see."

"Yes."

"Now the stylographic pen never shades."

"Every word, every line is alike, of the same size as you see."

"Miss Bell, you amaze me," cried the colonel.

"Now, as Captain Ainsley writes with a pen of that description, as it can be shown that he is the only man in the fort who does, as he is a boon companion of Captain Stanhope, and this anonymous letter is written on paper such as Stanhope used, and written with a stylographic pen, why the next thing to find out is what motive the captain had for wishing to get rid of that Boy Scout, that he would stoop to write an anonymous letter against him, address it to himself and tack it upon his own door?"

"I know this looks like a very sweeping charge to make, Colonel Emmett, against one of your trusted officers, but I see things as they are, as they appear to me, and Captain Ainsley is now away, gone to see the sister of the dead boy, to discover if the revenge against his platoon of executioners started with her."

"He has gone, and these facts of the anonymous letter, the note-paper and the pen it was written with, are clever witnesses, though there is another that I wish to consult."

"Who is that?" and the colonel's face wore a worried expression.

"His hand-writing," was the calm reply of Miss Bell.

Mrs. Emmett at this turned over the notes in her lap, and took out several.

It was evident that she was leaning toward Miss Bell's way of thinking, for she said:

"You know, husband, that Ainsley was appointed into the army, and is not a West Pointer, and there was some scandal in his life I have heard, just after his entering it, though I must say he is a good soldier and pleasant gentleman."

"Yes, but to the writing."

"Let us see his hand-writing, wife," the colonel said, anxiously.

Several notes were handed over.

"They were all written with a stylographic pen, and one is on the same paper the anonymous communication is written on, showing that he made it at Captain Stanhope's quarters; yes, for it says that the captain accepts with him your kind invitation to dine, Mrs. Emmett."

"So it does."

"Now, Colonel Emmett, compare, please, these notes with the anonymous letter and see what you think."

"By Heaven! it is Ainsley's writing, disguise it as he may have tried to do," sharply said the colonel, and an angry light came into his eyes.

"Yes, Charles, I can see now that it is his hand, disguised," Mrs. Emmett sadly said.

"I shall recall him at once," said the colonel, sternly.

"No, colonel, for he has a man who will shadow him wherever he may go, and then you may have still better proof against him."

"Miss Bell, you are right, and it is just what must be done."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PLOT.

THE colonel was deeply moved at what he now felt was proof that Captain Ainsley had been in some way an accomplice in the accusation against the Boy Scout.

There was one thing, however, that puzzled him, and he lay awake late thinking it over.

That was that Spanish Joe, who had brought in the news of the Boy Scout having deposited a letter which a masked horseman got, and afterward killed the guard and robbed the coach, must have told the truth.

If he did not, was he an accomplice of Captain Ainsley to get rid of the boy?

The colonel talked it over with his wife, and after breakfast Miss Bell was called into consultation.

She was told of the two scouts who were sent to shadow the Boy Scout, and asked what she thought of their being the accomplices of Captain Ainsley in a plot against the Boy Scout?

"I would like to see them, sir, before I judge."

"But would it not be well to first send for their chief and find out all you can about them from him?"

"Yes, I will send for Buck Taylor at once."

So Miss Bell again sought her hiding-place in the alcove, and Buck Taylor, the chief of scouts at the fort, was announced.

He was a tall man, several inches over six feet, built like a giant, and had made a very enviable record upon the frontier.

In response to the colonel's questions as to the antecedents of Spanish Joe and Pony Pete, he replied that the former was a New Mexican, a gambler, and tricky, with little known of his past life.

"Pony Pete is as square as they make 'em, colonel, and I will stake big money on him every time," he added.

"Thank you, Taylor, for I was anxious to get your candid opinion as I desire to see the two men, so please send them to me, first Pony Pete, afterward Spanish Joe."

The chief of scouts departed, and the colonel asked:

"Well, Miss Bell, what do you think of Buck Taylor?"

"Just the man to tie to, colonel, when you need a friend, in danger and for advice."

"Good!"

"Now we will have your opinion of Pony Pete, for here he comes."

Pony Pete, a sunburned, hard-faced little man, came in and looked embarrassed.

He told the colonel how he had seen the masked horseman hold up the coach, shoot the guard and escape with the treasure before he could get to the scene, for he was upon a high ridge.

Spanish Joe had told him, when he described the masked horseman, that he was the very man who had gotten the letter from the hiding-place where the Boy Scout had placed it.

"You have no reason to doubt Spanish Joe, have you?"

"Well, colonel, I hain't got no reason ter believe him, for he do lie powerful about little things, and he hev once cheated me at keards."

"Thank you, Pete," and the scout was dismissed.

"Now your opinion, Miss Bell?" called out the colonel.

"I would trust that man, implicitly, colonel."

"Spanish Joe is coming."

Miss Bell glided into her hiding-place, and Spanish Joe entered.

He was a Mexican half-breed, with a furtive glance, a hardened face and an evil eye.

His face was scarred, he limped slightly, dressed half in Mexican costume and was noted as a splendid scout.

"Spanish Joe, I wish to ask you to tell me over again about your shadowing young Kent the Boy Scout, when you saw him hide that letter?"

The man started very slightly, and said in good English:

"I saw him hide the letter among the rocks and then go on his way."

"Before I reached the spot a horseman came up at a gallop, leant over on the rocks and got the letter."

"A horseman?"

"Yes, sir, he was masked and dressed in buckskin."

"He rode a big bay horse and went away at a gallop."

"Why did you not kill him?"

"I was told only to shadow the Boy Scout, sir; but he robbed the coach the next day."

"How do you know?"

"Pony Pete described the man, and I knew it was the one who got the letter, sir."

"All right, you can go now, Spanish Joe."

The man left the room and when Miss Bell appeared the colonel asked:

"You saw him, Miss Bell?"

"I did, sir."

"Your opinion, please?"

"I could not have a worse one, sir, for that man has a black heart and would be guilty of any crime."

"Whew!" said the colonel while Mrs. Emmett came into the room and said:

"I agree with you, Miss Bell, for the man was also most repulsive looking to me."

"Then you think he would lie against the Boy Scout if it was to his interest to do so?"

"I am sure of it, sir, and without knowing the Boy Scout, but merely confident in my own mind that there was a plot against him, I believe the man did lie, and if it brought him to his death little would one with such a face care," and Miss Bell spoke most earnestly, for a moment losing her calm manner of speaking.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SHADOWED.

AFTER the conversation regarding Spanish Joe had been changed, Miss Bell said:

"Colonel Emmett, I have something to ask you, and to tell you."

"I shall be glad to answer the one and hear the other, Miss Bell."

"You know that I am fond of riding?"

"Yes."

"Well, I would like to have permission to go and come alone, for if I wish company I will ask for an escort."

"But it is dangerous work."

"Not for me, for I will ride that fleet horse I rode yesterday, and I always go armed."

"But you may lose your way."

"No, for, as I told you, I am a frontier girl, having passed much of my life in the Southwest."

"Well, I cannot refuse you, only be very careful."

"Yes, Miss Bell, pray be most careful," added Mrs. Emmett anxiously.

"I will promise to be, and I thank you for your permission to go alone, and for your consideration for my safety; but do not be alarmed, for I am fully capable of taking care of myself."

"I can believe that, Miss Bell."

"But now what was it that you had to tell me?"

"I see that the gentlemen are also curious, though ladies are the ones mostly accused of that failing?"

"I admit that I am curious to know what you have to tell, Miss Bell."

"I shall not delay telling it then, sir."

"Can I also listen?" asked Mrs. Emmett.

"Oh, yes, for you were also with me when I made the discovery."

"Then you have made a discovery?"

"Yes, and one I deem important, for it was when I visited the grave of the Boy Scout."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, colonel."

"And you have kept it all this time?"

"Oh yes, for it would keep."

"It was just this, that some one has driven tacks into the headboard."

"Tacks?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do they disfigure it?"

"Oh, no, but they were put there for a purpose."

"What purpose?"

"There are ten of them, sir, just ten tacks, driven under the name of the Boy Scout," was the very significant reply of the maiden.

"Ten, and there were ten sentinels killed on their posts," said the colonel.

"Yes, and the ten sentinels were the men who shot the Boy Scout, and the ten tacks are driven into the headboard, to mark that many slain in revenge, so that proves that they were killed by one who is a Nemesis, one who is avenging that youth."

"Yes, Miss Bell, there cannot be the slightest doubt of that now," said the colonel, impressively.

This story of Miss Bell was the topic of con-

versation between the three for some time, and in the afternoon, and later, Emma Bell ordered her horse and went out for a gallop.

The young officers saw her go alone with regret, and yet one who offered himself as an escort had his services most politely yet kindly declined.

From that day, morning and afternoon, Miss Bell was wont to take a long ride by herself, greatly to the regret of those who sought to be her escort.

Where she went, what she did, she did not say to any one, unless to the colonel and his wife, and many wondered why she would insist upon going alone.

She had become most popular with all she had met, and though several of the ladies at the fort said that she was too *manish* to suit their taste, they could not but admire her pluck.

But the gentlemen thought differently, and when the fair guest of their colonel had a fortune of a million dollars, with even half as much if she found her brother, which those most interested hoped she never would, they could forgive much in her that seemed perhaps a trifle unwomanly, even to the taking of human life.

If Miss Bell knew just how she was regarded, she did not show that she did.

She kept to herself, except for her friendship with Mrs. Emmett, which was sincere.

She went on her lonely rides, and went armed.

She rode where she pleased, was gone as long as suited her, and went and returned at her own sweet will.

One morning she went upon her usual ride, and she went along a valley between two ranges of hills and where the country was heavily timbered.

She knew the trail as it was the one that On Time Charlie took with his coach upon going to and from the fort.

She knew that the coach was due at noon at the fort and rode on as though to meet it, for to On Time Charlie she had been really more kind than to any of the officers.

The driver had admitted that he was "gone," as he expressed it, upon the girl, and said that he was happy in the kindnesses which she from time to time showed him.

Whether he dreamed for a moment that he could win her regard, as he wished, remains to be seen.

One thing Miss Bell had been a close observer of in her rides, and that was that she was almost constantly seeing Spanish Joe.

Now, as she looked back from a rise she beheld that scout following her, and she said:

"He is shadowing me; there is no doubt of that."

CHAPTER XXV.

CAUGHT.

THE thought that Spanish Joe was following her did not seem to disturb Miss Bell in the slightest degree.

She merely rode into a thicket, hitched her horse and returned to the side of the trail, hiding behind a large boulder.

On came Spanish Joe, following her trail.

As his horse was passing the rock there suddenly was launched forth a lariat.

One end was fast to a tree, the other settled over the head of the rider.

The horse gave a spring in his fright and Spanish Joe was dragged to the ground with a force that half-stunned him.

To his amazement, the lassoed Mexican saw that his captor was a woman, standing over him and covering him with her revolver, while she had quickly and most dextrously disarmed him the instant he fell.

"Why are you following me, Spanish Joe?" she asked.

"I am not following you," he said, sullenly.

"I say you are."

"You have half killed me, so let me get up."

"Oh, no; I shall hold you as my prisoner—see! Hold out your hands."

As she spoke she took from her pocket a pair of manacles.

"Who are you?"

"Never mind who I am. Obey me, or I will kill you."

He held his hands up together, and they were at once manacled.

"You can throw a lasso," he growled.

"Oh, yes; I can do anything to protect myself from such as you."

"I have done you no harm."

"No, but you intended to. I am well aware of your purposes. But come, now, get up and mount your horse."

She caught his horse, which was but a few paces distant, and forced him to mount.

Then she took her lasso and firmly bound his feet beneath the animal.

"Now you go with me."

"Where to?"

"Never mind where; you go."

She mounted her horse, took his in lead, and rode toward the mountains.

At last she halted in a canyon, dismounted, ordered him to do the same, and bound him firmly to a tree.

"Now I wish you to tell me the truth."

"About what?"

"How much did Captain Ainsley give you for telling that lie upon the Boy Scout?"

"I never told a lie on the boy!"

"You did, and you were paid to do so."

"I was not!"

"I know you got a good price, and if you do not tell me, I'll take you back to the fort and turn you over to Buck Taylor, who will gladly hang you to wipe out the disgrace of having such a man as you are as one of his band of scouts."

"Quick! What did Captain Ainsley pay you to tell that lie on the Boy Scout?"

"You won't hang me?"

"I am no hangman."

"Five hundred dollars."

"All right. Just keep that to yourself until I tell you to talk."

"Now you are to remain here, and Buck Taylor will come after you."

"You said you would not hang me."

"I am no hangman, I said; but I will simply send Buck Taylor to bring you a prisoner to the fort to-night, and you are to say nothing of the charges against you."

"I'll not do so; but you'll save me?"

"If you obey me, yes. Now I will leave you."

The prisoner begged not to be left alone there, but Miss Bell coolly mounted her horse and rode away, saying that she would send after him in good time.

She went back to the stage trail, and was riding slowly along it when she heard the rumble of wheels.

Soon the coach came in sight, and, as he overtook her, On Time Charlie drew rein.

"Any passengers, Charlie?" she asked.

"Captain Ainsley, miss, and a miner," was the answer.

"Ah, Captain Ainsley! I am glad to see you back again," said Miss Bell, as the officer, awakened from a nap looked out of the coach window.

"And I am happy in seeing you, Miss Bell; but you are surely not alone so far from the fort?"

"Oh, yes; I ramble at will; but if On Time Charlie will hitch my horse to a leader I will ride back with him on the box."

Captain Ainsley looked disappointed at this decision, while On Time Charlie was so pleased he sprang from the box at a leap and grasped the rein of the horse.

He soon had him hitched alongside of a leader, and turned to aid Miss Bell to the box when he found she had mounted, unaided, to the seat, refusing the captain's request to enter the coach.

"It is so stuffy riding inside," she said.

Then she added:

"I prefer to ride with Charlie."

The captain slunk back in sullen mood, glancing daggers at the white-haired miner upon whose face he had detected a smile at her preference, he thought, of the driver, to himself.

An hour after Miss Bell entered the quarters of her host somewhat hastily and asked Mrs. Emmett to bring her husband at once to see her, for she had news for him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CAPTAIN'S STORY.

COLONEL EMMETT hastened to obey the summons of Miss Bell, and she said quickly:

"Sit down, colonel, for I have much to tell you."

"Has anything gone wrong with you?"

"On the contrary everything has gone right, for, let me tell you first, that Captain Ainsley has returned."

"Ah!"

"He came in on On Time Charlie's coach to-day."

"Alone?"

"Oh no; his shadow was with him."

"His shadow?"

"Yes; a gray-haired miner whom I recognized, in spite of his smoothly shaven face and white wig as Carter Kendrick, the Detective Sergeant."

"Then he returned with him?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the captain?"

"Does not suspect him, I am sure."

"I hope not; but I will soon have a call from one, or both of them."

"The sergeant will not come until night, sir."

"You have indeed given me news."

"I have more, for I rode out on the stage trail this morning determined to ride back on the box with On Time Charlie."

"And you did?"

"Yes; he hitched my horse to one of the leaders and I rode back on the box."

"More and more you surprise me, Miss Bell."

"Let me give you another surprise, sir."

"Well?"

"I have been shadowed the past week."

"You?"

"Yes, sir."

"Shadowed?"

"True."

"By whom?"

"Spanish Joe."

"Why did you not tell me of this?"

"I knew you would put a stop to it and I wished to do that myself."

"Did you?" anxiously asked the colonel.

"Don't look frightened, for I did not kill him."

"What then?"

"I only laid in ambush for him, caught him with my lasso."

"Your lasso?"

"Yes, sir, for I can throw a lariat fairly well."

"You caught him?"

"Yes, sir, and made him prisoner, for I slipped a pair of handcuffs upon him—"

"Handcuffs?"

"Yes, sir; I always go prepared for emergencies."

"I see."

"I took him to a canyon in the mountains, tied him to tree and got a confession from him."

"A confession?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was it?"

"I told him that I knew he intended to kidnap me, and that somebody was in the plot with him."

"Kidnap you?"

"Yes, sir, that was Spanish Joe's plot."

"The villain!"

"Oh, he had a master in it, you may be sure!"

"A master?"

"Yes, sir, but I cannot yet tell you who it was."

"He made the confession to me that I expected he would, and so I bound him securely and said that I would send Buck Taylor after him to-night, for, except to the chief of scouts, his capture must be kept a secret, as I do not wish to spoil what has begun so well."

"What a marvel you are, Miss Bell."

"Now, colonel, will you send for Buck Taylor, send him after Spanish Joe, have him bring him in by the Fatal Post way to-night, where there must be no sentinel?"

"No sentinel?"

"No, sir, but I will explain that later to you. Let Buck Taylor go after Spanish Joe, for I will tell you just where he can find him, and he must reach the secret cell with him, no one knowing that he is a prisoner, and place over him a guard he can trust among his own men."

"I will be governed by you in this matter, Miss Bell, for you certainly seem to know just what you are about."

"She does, Charles, so trust her fully," Mrs. Emmett said.

Captain Ainsley was then announced, but before he was invited into the private room Miss Bell made her way to the alcove and went into hiding.

"Ah, Captain Ainsley, welcome back."

"I am glad to see you, for I was anxious about you."

"There was no need of that, sir, as the lady I went to see is dead, so was in no way connected with these revengeful murders, and it now devolves upon us to find the assassin here in the fort."

"Well, we can but try; but there has been no murder since your departure, captain."

"I am glad to hear that, sir."

"And the sister of the Boy Scout is dead, you say?"

"Yes, sir, and has been for some time."

"Well, I am sorry we were led to misjudge her, from what you said."

"I am also sorry, sir, but we must find the assassin here."

"I will do all in my power, captain; but you look wan and fatigued, so seek rest now and call to-morrow to see me."

The captain departed and Miss Bell came forth from her hiding-place.

"What do you think of his story, Miss Bell?"

"I believe, sir, that he is right in part; but, Colonel Emmett, I know that he paid five hundred dollars to Spanish Joe to bring word in to you that the Boy Scout was a traitor," was the decided reply of Miss Bell.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SERGEANT'S STORY.

It was just after nightfall when Sergeant Carter Kendrick made his way to the quarters of Colonel Emmett, still dressed as a miner and wearing his white wig and a pair of spectacles.

"Well, Kendrick, I would never have known you, had Miss Bell not told me that a gray-haired miner returned with Captain Ainsley."

"Yes, sir, I stuck close to him, was like his very shadow in fact, though I had to change my disguise a dozen times."

"Well, where did he go?"

"There is that which I have to tell you, colonel, which will surprise you."

"Out with it, Kendrick."

"Well, sir, the captain loved a lady who was to be sole heir to a large fortune, in case her brother did not return home."

"Her name, sir, was Miss Kate Kenton, and her brother was a runaway from home under certain false charges, as they proved to be afterward, and now it is suspected by one person, an old nurse, that Captain Ainsley drove the boy away."

"Can this be true?"

"He failed to marry the lady, sir, for she loved one who, afterward it was said, was an ex-convict who had escaped from prison."

"She ran off with him, however, and went in search of her brother."

"At last it was said her brother was killed, and hearing this, and knowing what the man she had married was, her heart was broken and she died, but no one seemed to know just when or where."

"Poor woman."

"Well, sir, as the captain heard she was dead he came back, but I do believe that he tried to get rid of the boy that he might marry the sister."

"This is a severe charge to make against an officer, Kendrick."

"I am acting as detective now, sir, and would make no charge I did not believe to be true."

"I believe that of you, Kendrick, and feel that you have done all that you deemed to be your duty."

"You can go now."

"Pardon me, colonel, but may I have the services of Sergeant Kendrick upon a prospecting tour this afternoon?" and Miss Bell came out of the alcove.

"Certainly, Miss Bell, if you wish."

"Then, sergeant, get a spade and shovel and await my coming over in the cemetery this afternoon," said Miss Bell, and half an hour after, accompanied by the surgeon of the fort, Doctor Dane, she walked away as though for an afternoon stroll.

At the cemetery they were joined by the supposed miner, to whom Miss Bell said:

"I wish you to open the grave of the Boy Ranger, miner, and Doctor Dane, you are to make as thorough an examination as possible, of the body."

"This grave has been opened before," said the sergeant.

"Has it?"

"Yes, miss."

"All right, open it again."

The sergeant obeyed, the coffin was taken out, the screws removed and Miss Bell said:

"Doctor Dane, it is the body of a boy?"

"Great God! it is the body of a woman! and here is a small tin box by the arm."

"Yes, you are to hand that box to Colonel Emmett."

"Now, sergeant, please return the coffin to the grave and fill it in."

"To-night you are to come to headquarters and report to Colonel Emmett."

"Shall we return now, Doctor Dane?"

The amazed surgeon walked back with Miss Bell, and when in the colonel's room made his report.

"Colonel, that is the body of a woman, and this box was in the coffin with her."

"I can vouch for that, sir, as one afternoon I opened the grave and made the same discovery."

"The sergeant is to report to you to-night and verify the surgeon and myself."

"You, Miss Bell?"

"Yes, sir, and that is the body of Kate Kenton, not of her brother, who is now riding Pony Express, sir, for I met him on my way out here, and he never knew that his sister was not dead, as he had been led to believe."

"She played her brother's part and was shot, carrying her secret to the grave with her."

"Poor, poor child!"

"And the man she married and who was so unworthy of her?" said the colonel.

"He is safe, sir, when wanted, and he will be wanted very soon."

"But now, Colonel Emmett, have you given orders about the Fatal Post remaining vacant to-night?"

"I thought it best to place the men there and then secretly order their removal."

"That is best, sir, and all is working just as I could wish."

"You surely do not expect to capture the assassin, to-night, of those sentinels, Miss Bell, for I believe you are plotting to that end?"

"That is just what I am plotting for, Colonel Emmett, and all I ask is your perfect confidence and aid."

"You shall have it, even though a woman accomplishes what men have thus far failed to do."

"A woman can not accomplish it alone, colonel; but await the result of the trap I have set for to-night."

"Have you ordered Buck Taylor to come here with his prisoner as soon as he arrives?"

"I have."

"Then all goes well," and Miss Bell looked triumphant at the hope of success before them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SILENT SENTINEL.

BUCK TAYLOR found the prisoner awaiting him, bound hands and feet, and entering the fort by the Fatal Post, where there was no sentinel, as per request of Miss Bell, he took Spanish Joe to the colonel's quarters.

Then Captain Ainsley was sent for and upon his arrival the colonel said sternly:

"Abner Ainsley, I have but a very few words to say to you, and unless you obey me, for the sake of saving the army from disgrace, I shall let you stand your trial as the accomplice in the murder of a woman, for in the grave where you suppose the Boy Scout to rest, lies his poor sister, Catherine Kenton, who was searching for her brother."

"You betrayed that poor boy, as you believed, to his death, and all of your evil life is known to me in your plot for gold; so sit there and instantly write out your resignation, and to-morrow take the coach away from this post."

"Refuse, and the disgrace shall fall by my putting you in irons."

"Mercy, Colonel Emmett, for I will resign, and I thank you for your clemency," said the man, his face as white as death.

"Take the coach to-morrow, and give what excuse you please. I will see that your resignation is accepted by my superior officers."

The man skulked out of the colonel's quarters and went to his own, crushed, trembling, and savage at heart.

Into the room then came Spanish Joe, with Buck Taylor.

"Sit there, sir, and sign that paper, then go to your quarters, get your traps, and your chief will see you well away from the fort."

"For your confession against Captain Ainsley I spare you, but again put your foot on this frontier and I shall see that you are hanged without trial."

"Begone, sir!"

Away went Spanish Joe, and as he left under guard of Buck Taylor, out of the alcove came Miss Bell.

"Now, colonel, I will keep my appointment made for to-night."

"You still insist upon going alone?"

"Oh, yes."

"But you are so wholly unprotected?"

"Not near so much as you may think, sir."

"But—"

"Do not fear, Colonel Emmett, but trust me fully."

"Yes, Charles, trust her fully," echoed Mrs. Emmett.

"All right; but I hate to see you go alone."

"Never fear."

Then Miss Bell threw about her the colonel's long army coat, and placing an officer's hat upon her head, she stuck upon her upper lip a

a false mustache, and with a wave of the hand left the house.

The colonel and his wife looked after her until they saw her disappear in the gloom, a sentinel saluting her as an officer.

Up toward the ridge where was the Fatal Post she went, and no guard was there.

She passed on through the stockade to the outpost, reached the spot where seven men had lost their lives so mysteriously at the hand of the assassin who had taken ten human lives of the fateful platoon who had shot a woman to death!

She stepped into the shadow of the timber, and after some little work upon her part, there appeared, leaning against a tree, as though asleep, the form of a sentinel, resting upon his musket.

Then Miss Bell stepped back into the shadow of the timber and waited.

Half an hour passed; an hour; yet she seemed to possess the patience of a red-skin on the watch.

At length a slight step was heard as a foot broke a twig, a whirring sound followed, a blow, and the sentinel form dropped its length upon the ground.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DICK DOOM APPEARS.

THERE was something in the manner in which the Silent Sentinel fell to the ground which caused a man, who had just buried a knife from his hand at it, to spring forward and bend in a surprised way over his supposed victim.

As he did so, like a shadow there glided out of the timber, upon the unsuspecting assassin, a form—Miss Bell!

An arm was raised and descended, and with a thud the assassin dropped his length upon the ground.

Bending over him the one who had struck the stunning blow clasped upon his wrists a pair of manacles, with the remark:

"You have had these on before, Valentine Gibson, and they are Golden Fetters and gold has been your god through life, leading you to commit the foulest of crimes to get it."

"Come! you are not so badly stunned as you would have me believe. Get up and come with me!"

The captor had taken away the belt of arms, slipped a noose about the prisoner's neck, and had him wholly at her mercy.

After a moment the man arose in a half-dazed way, and hoarsely from his lips came the words:

"Who are you?"

"Come and I will show you."

The prisoner could but obey, and was led back through the stockade to the colonel's quarters.

Entering the room there came the words:

"Colonel Emmett, I have brought you the assassin of your sentinels!"

"Great God! It is On Time Charlie?" cried the colonel, as he beheld the man.

"Yes, colonel, it is the man you have known as the Overland driver, On Time Charlie, but whose evil life I know but too well."

"Again and again have I had him under the shadow of the gallows, only to have him escape."

"The last time he feigned madness, escaped from an asylum, and came West."

"He it was who married that poor girl, Kate Kenton, and she, feeling that she was at his mercy, obeyed him, but only with the determination to end it all some day, as her confession read, which I took from her grave."

"This man it is who has killed the guards and passengers and robbed them—robbed his own coach."

"It is this man, who, really loving poor, unfortunate Kate Kenton, but cheated out of her fortune by her death, avenged himself by killing the men who were her executioners, for he truly revels in taking human life."

"Now, sir, you know who it is that I have shadowed to the gallows."

"Yes, you have shadowed me to the end, woman, but in Heaven's name, who are you?" gasped the prisoner, white and appalled at his position.

"I need no longer wear the mask I have on, and which your good wife, colonel, has known the truth of, for I told her all the night I first came to your home."

"You, I deceived, sir, for I found it to my interest and my work to do so."

"But, Colonel Emmett, forgive me, for I am not a woman."

"Not a woman?" cried the amazed officer.

"Ha! I know you now, and I wonder that I did not before this penetrate your disguise."

"You are Dick Doom, the Detective of the Golden Fetters—the man I would give my life to slay—yes, die upon the gallows gladly, if I could only grasp your throat in my good right hand," and the prisoner made a move, when he found a revolver looking into his eyes, and heard the words:

"Don't try it, Valentine Gibson, for I am Dick Doom, and you know that my aim is deadly."

Then, turning to the commandant the detective continued:

"Am I forgiven, Colonel Emmett, for deceiving you as I have?"

"And your lost brother?" gasped the colonel.

"All a fairy story, sir."

"Yes, yes, Miss Bell—I mean Mr. Doom, I do heartily forgive you, for you have accomplished just what I wished done, and you have done it well and nobly."

"Yes, a thousand times I forgive you; and, only think! my wife—a woman too—kept the secret so all important!"

"Now go and let me see you as you are."

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

THERE is little more to add, other than that Dick Doom did not leave the fort until he saw this man he had so well shadowed die upon the gallows.

Then he returned eastward, to continue on in his remarkable and perilous career as the Detective of the Golden Fetters, in which he added still greater *clat* to his name as a human ferret.

Sergeant Kendrick went steadily upward in the army until he received a commission as a lieutenant, and was a happy man.

Spanish Joe was not heard of again, while Captain Ainsley fled from the country through fear of arrest, but wherever he may roam he can never drive from his conscience the grave on the frontier in which lies the form of the woman whom he professed to love, and who was executed as Kit Kent, the Boy Scout, and the secret of which was revealed by the detective work of Dick Doom in the Wild West.

THE END.

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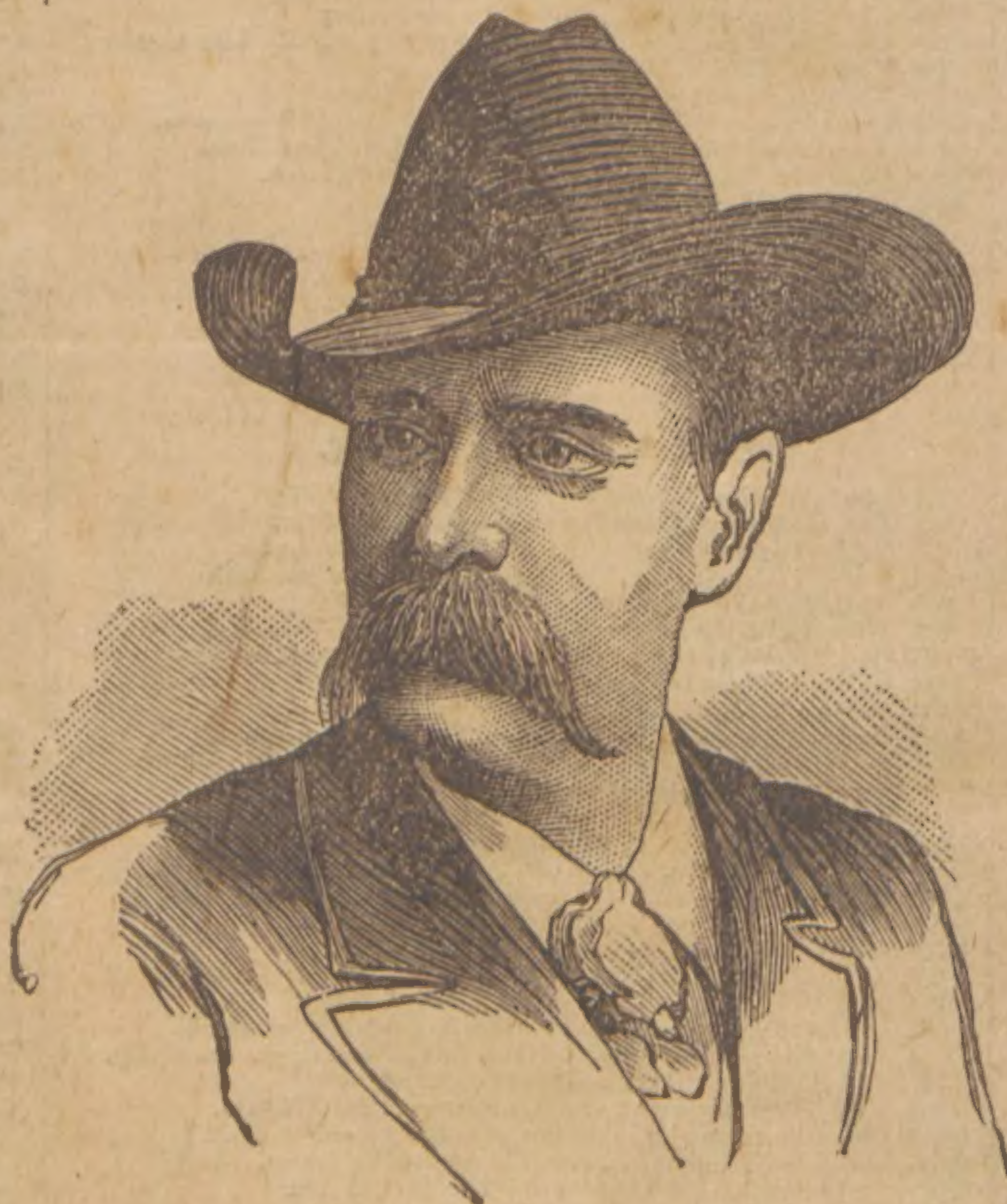
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